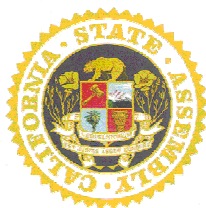


California Holocaust Memorial Week

April 28 – May 4, 2008



*Assemblymember Ira Ruskin
21st Assembly District*



*Assemblymember Mike Feuer
42nd Assembly District*



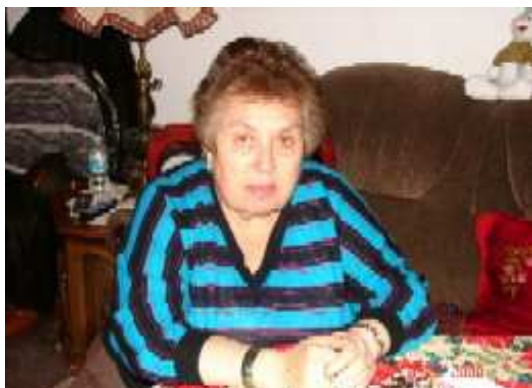
Raya Grabina, Kriti Khari,
Karla Coleman and Preetibala Kaur



Karen Shein and Jeannie Strauss



Jona Goldrich



Faina Paverman



Irwin Goldstein's Family

April 28, 2008

Dear Friends,

We are proud to present the 2008 California Holocaust Memorial Book. For the past five years, the California State Assembly has honored survivors during California Holocaust Memorial Week in April. Through this project, California honors the lives and experiences of the survivors of the Holocaust, gives remembrance to the millions who lost their lives, and works to ensure that people understand the horrors of genocide.

Inside this book you will find many powerful portrayals of courage and survival during one of the most horrific periods in human history. Students met individually with Holocaust survivors throughout the state of California, forging personal connections that facilitated a deep contextual understanding of Holocaust atrocities. Through these interviews, many young Californians were able to gain an expanded appreciation for the courage of Holocaust survivors who bravely endured so much suffering. Their heroism will live on through the stories told in this book.

Survivors from throughout California are invited to sit with Assemblymembers on the Assembly floor during the Holocaust Memorial Ceremony. This year's ceremony is particularly significant as Israel celebrates its 60th anniversary on May 14, 2008.

We are honored to have had the opportunity to coordinate this project, and we appreciate the support and participation of the survivors, students and our colleagues. We are confident that this project will continue to thrive as we celebrate those who have survived to tell their stories, and seek to ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Feuer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Feuer" clearly legible.

MIKE FEUER
Assemblymember, 42nd District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ira Ruskin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ira" and last name "Ruskin" clearly legible.

IRA RUSKIN
Assemblymember, 21st District

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Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

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*Interviewed by Alex Owens &
Devon Fernandez*

George Heller

*Interviewed by Rochelle Reuter &
Carson Applewhite*

Margret Kanner

*Interviewed by Audrey Harris &
Devon Fernandez*

Judith Rabbie

*Interviewed by Laura Nelson &
Annika Flink*

Herb Rosenbaum

*Interviewed by Olivia Galioto &
Meagan Sharif*

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Bobbi Bornstein, Volunteer Coordinator*

*Todd Dickson, Principal
Elana Feinberg, History Teacher
Summit Preparatory Charter High School
Redwood City, CA*

Margot Goldberg

By Alex Owens and Devon Fernandez

Margot Cohen was born in the big city of Düsseldorf, Germany. She lived a comfortable life with her father, Arthur, mother, Johanna, and older brother, Walter. Arthur worked for the family business, building machinery for butcher shops, and Johanna was a homemaker, but each of her parents had a college degree. Both sets of grandparents lived close by. Her grandfather, Isaac, on her father's side, was a well-known philanthropist. He was very generous, being one of the only people to pay for his employees' medical expenses. Their family observed most Jewish practices and dietary customs. The surrounding Jewish families were very similar to her own. She had a pleasant life and enjoyed playing with her girlfriends.

She attended regular grade school until age 10, when she was eligible to apply to high school. She applied to a respected all-girls high school and was accepted. However, by the time she was ready to go, she was denied entry because of her religion. Margot never really experienced any anti-Semitism until Hitler started to become more powerful. Her parents did everything they could to shield her from the rising hatred towards Jew. They advised her and her brother not to talk to each other while in public because people may over hear it and twist their words. She was aware of what was going on and described it as a "vague unease." Margot still remembers a particular incident where she was bullied by local boys. They took her books and stepped on her hat while she was walking home from school.

In 1938, the discrimination escalated, especially during Kristallnacht. Jewish homes were burned along with temples and synagogues. The surrounding non-Jewish families tried their best to protect Margot and her family because of her grandfather's hospitable reputation. Despite the efforts of their neighbors, Margot's family was found and her father was taken to a concentration camp for 6 weeks. During the first 3 days of his absence, Margot sat by the window awaiting his return. Her family tried to comfort her, but she insisted on being left alone. When he finally came home, he was dirty, had a shaved head, was half his size, but he was still alive.

When she was 13 years old, her parents sent her on the Kindertransport, a rescue operation that took nearly 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Germany and placed them in British homes, hostels, and schools. When the day finally arrived for her to leave, her father took her to the train station. Just then it hit her that she will probably never see her parents again. This was a very hard and emotional time for her. She was only allowed to bring one suitcase on the train. However, unlike most children, she knew where she was going. Her father had business deals in England and found an all-girls high school that she could attend.

When she arrived in London, she met her foster family and was taken to their home in Stoke-on-Trent, a town in the Midlands. The family consisted of a father,

mother, older daughter and younger son. The father and daughter showed her kindness, while the mother and son were horrible to her. During her first night there, she recalls her foster mother asking her what food she didn't enjoy. Margot tried to be polite by insisting that she would eat anything, but the mother persisted until Margot finally said she didn't care for fish. Throughout the next few days, her meals consisted primarily of fish. This made Margot feel insignificant and hurt. She stayed with this family for 6 months and upon leaving, she cried tears of relief.

She stayed with her next family for 6 months, as well. Apparently, the family heard voices telling them to keep her for that long. After those 6 months, she moved in with yet another family. This was during the height of the bombings and the mother was a very nervous person. She was nice, but asked Margot to move out because she was worried about being responsible for a non-family member's safety. Next, she stayed with a poor coal miner's family. They were kind towards Margot. The daughter was seen as "a bad girl" and her parents constantly praised Margot because of her good behavior.

The last family she stayed with was her school friend, Marjory Daw. Marjory's father protected Margot much like her own father did. During the war, they were evacuated from the south of England and were therefore living in Stoke-on-Trent. She stayed with them until the war ended when the Daw family returned to their home in the South. Margot couldn't go with them and instead stayed at a YWCA. Soon, she got a job as an interpreter in the US Army and, in November of 1945, she was sent to Berlin. Later, she moved to Kansas City where she met her husband and settled down. She has three daughters, Carole, Marilyn, and JoAnne. About 20 years ago, when all her children were grown and in college, she moved to California. She now has six grandchildren, with ages varying from eleven to twenty-four. All of her children and grandchildren are aware of her story.

She later found out her parents had been killed in a concentration camp, however she stayed in contact with her brother, Walter, and made him move from England to the US to be close to her. He is now retired in Florida with his wife. They talk on the phone often and she has plans to see him soon.

About 15 years ago, Margot was invited by the government of Germany to visit her hometown of Duesseldorf and was treated like royalty. They invited many other Holocaust survivors and were very kind towards them. However, as hard as the German government tried to make retribution, they could never undo what had happened. During this visit, she spoke at a high school and pictures of her were put in the newspaper. Coincidentally, her childhood maid from Duesseldorf came across these pictures and tracked her down. They met up and the maid spoke of stories about how she had risked her life to take care of Margot's grandfather after her parents were taken away. Margot was very thankful that she had a chance to reunite with this woman with whom she could share so many great memories.

Today, Margot Goldberg lives in Palo Alto and keeps busy by working part-time. Margot is an inspiration. Throughout all she has been through, she continues to keep a

positive attitude about life. She spends as much time as she can with her family and enjoys watching her grandchildren grow up. She doesn't dwell on the past and lives in the now. The message she wants everyone to understand is that the Holocaust really did happen and that she is living proof of it. She wishes people will try to prevent anything like this from happening again.

George Heller

By Rochelle Reuter and Carson Applewhite

A Holocaust Survivor Story

The Holocaust was an awful and terrifying event that happened in the 1940's. The deterioration of a single race and religion is unforgettable. George Heller, a survivor of this terrible epidemic had an incredibly interesting and compelling story. George Heller was born in Budapest Hungary in 1924. He grew up with his brother and sister and his parents, Kalman and Gizella Heller. In the city where George grew up, his neighborhood was predominantly Jewish. Budapest was approximately 50% Jewish so he grew up practicing Judaism with his family. He was raised in a Conservative Jewish family. His family owned a small business in Budapest before the Holocaust. George attended four years of elementary school in Budapest as well as having eight years of Gimnazium (high school). Religion and education were both taught at his public high school.

Life as a Jew was not as difficult in the beginning; he lived within a Jewish community and was a university student. When he was growing up, George had extensive education in several languages: Hungarian, Hebrew, German, Latin, English and some French, This made a huge impact on his communication skills and his ability to adapt. At the beginning of WWII Hitler did not pay too much attention to George's country because it was run by an anti-Semitic leader; therefore, Hitler left it to the Hungarian government to handle its "Jewish Problem." Hungary had its own Nazi party, the Arrow Cross. Towards the height of the anti-Semitic movement, Hitler's forces entered Hungary and took George and many other Jews in a labor camp in Hungary, then shipped them to Austria, where they did intensive labor, endured freezing climates, and had very little food. Afterwards, they were forced on a three-day death march to the Concentration Camp of Mauthausen. If someone paused for even briefly, they were shot and killed on the spot.

At the age of 27, George's brother was sent to a forced labor camp on the Russian front and sadly died as a slave laborer. His sister was brutally murdered in the Ghetto in Budapest. Losing family members is physiologically and emotionally difficult. The amount of pain and suffering is unbearable. He overcame so many deaths in his family which only shows how much courage and bravery George has. Following his brother's death, in 1944 George was forced into the labor service known as the Hungarian Labor Service. Following several month of slave labor in Budapest, George was sent with other slave laborers to Austria. His unit was transported in a cattle car train with no bathroom facilities, no food or water, and no windows for air. Not only were there limited resources, they put 80 Jews in each cattle car. This caused many diseases to spread which ultimately caused even more deaths. George is considered lucky to have survived the Box Cars. During his time at the labor camp, he was forced to work in extremely harsh conditions such as digging holes with very little food and water. Six months later, George

was required to death march to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. This death march lasted for 3 days without any food or water. When there was a chance to stop, George would eat grass from the ground just so he wouldn't starve to death. He lasted in the concentration camp until the spring of 1945 when American troops had liberated them. It was the fall of the Nazi regime and the fall of the genocide.

Once the war ended, George Heller wanted to know what had become of his family. His friend was traveling to Budapest, so he was able to let George know what had happened; when he returned, his friend notified him that his mother was alive and had sent him the address of an aunt who was living in New York. Because of his broad range of languages, he was able to obtain work as an interpreter for the American Army at a Displaced Persons Camps. Later on, he was working for the United Nations Team (UNRRA) managing the DP camps, and worked there until the spring of 1946. His work was recognized when he was given a visa to immigrate to the United States. When he left, he was on the fifth transport to America. He arrived in New York with two dollars in his pocket and the shirt on his back. His aunt met him at the dock and took him to stay at her small apartment. She was married, and had a job as a seamstress. In order to begin supporting himself (as his aunt did not make much money), George became a busboy on the Lower Eastside of New York for about one year.

After about six months as a busboy, George received a letter from a program urging him to pursue college. He enrolled at Temple University in Philadelphia, and stayed there for four years. Two of those years were spent studying liberal arts, and the next two were business. After he completed the four years, he searched for a job, but jobs were incredibly difficult to obtain due to the GI's returning from the war. While still searching for a solid job, he met his wife and they married in 1954. He was doing poorly, while he and his wife were living in New York City. He was now thirty years old, and applied to enroll to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. For three years, he studied electrical engineering and computers at MIT. He also studied at New York University and at Columbia University.

He worked at the MIT computer center, and then got a job at International Business Machines Corporation (IBM.) He worked at IBM for thirty years. Throughout that time he became involved in how to teach computers; he chaired the Education Committee of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), for its education program for computer science. In 1968, he became a National Lecturer of ACM, in 1971 he was elected to the New York Academy of Sciences. In the year of 2004, he was listed in "Who's Who in America." He has been retired for the past eighteen years and lives happily with his wife of fifty-three years; they both teach classes at the senior center. They have four children and nine grandchildren.

George Heller's story is remarkable, unique, and unforgettable. Life as a Jew during the Holocaust was extremely difficult and even deadly. George is one of the few who survived the trauma and he deserves to be commended for his nobility and courage. As we found out, his life story is far from over; he is an active member in his community and continues to inspire others as he has inspired us.

Margret Kanner

By Audrey Harris and Devon Fernandez

“You can’t judge a group of people because of one person.” This is what Margret Kanner learned from her experience during the Holocaust and is something she hopes will save the world from current and future atrocities. The discrimination and judgment of a whole group based on one man’s opinion is what led to the Holocaust.

Margret Kanner was born in a large city in Germany called Elberfeld. It was divided by a river and had a big downtown with many schools and even a college. Margret’s mother, father, older brother and even grandmother lived with her and were very close. Her father, Gustav Berger, was a traveling salesman for factories while her mother, Anna Berger, stayed home and took care of the house. However, when her father became ill, her mother took over the job. “My mother was a hard act to follow,” Margret recalls.

While her brother, Stefan, prevailed in Hebrew school, Margret failed to live up to her brother’s achievements. Being young enough to stay home from temple, only going on special holidays, she considered herself German first and Jewish second. She had many friends and believed her life to be normal.

Once Hitler became more powerful, Margret started to become aware of the tensions between Jews and non-Jews. The friends she once had started to call her “dirty Jew” and other hurtful and derogatory terms. She was beaten up physically and emotionally because of her religion.

When the situation in Germany became more severe, the KinderTransport started taking children out of the country in hope of moving them to a safer environment. Stefan was the first one in his family to be evacuated from Elberfeld and was sent to Massachusetts. He was able to maintain contact with his parents. Soon after, her father was forced into a concentration camp. Her mother was informed that if she found a country willing to take Gustav, that he would be released from the concentration camp and immediately sent to that country. With hard work and determination Anna was able to help Gustav immigrate to Cuba. He was released from the concentration camp and was only allowed 24 hours to depart from his old life in Germany.

Later Margret was informed that she would have to leave Germany in the KinderTransport much like her brother. Her mother dropped Margret and her cousin, Ruth, off at the train station. She was overwhelmed by the thought that she may never see her family again. Over the years, Margret built an emotional wall to protect herself from the upsetting memories of leaving home. When Margret finally reached England, she had to rely on her diary to tell her what happened on the train. Although distressed over leaving Germany, she couldn’t help but think, “Maybe people will like me now, even though I’m Jewish.”

Separated from her cousin, who was sent to Denmark, Margret lived with the Howson family in Bicester. (Margret later learned that the Dutch family Ruth was sent to had exploited her.) The Howsons were kind to Margret but they weren't affectionate. They owned a school and lived above it. The Howsons later took in a 9-year-old named Inge. Struck by homesickness, Inge cried often which aggravated the Howsons. Margret attempted to comfort her when she could. Margret and Inge went to the Howson's school without knowing the English language. Every month, Margret's mother would send her money, which she used to buy chocolate and candy, since the necessities were taken care of by her foster parents. Because mail was intercepted between England and Germany, Margret would send letters to relatives in Holland who would then send them to Anna, in order to stay in contact with her mom. While attending school in England, a girl named Dorothy befriended Margret and became a motherly figure towards her.

After 11 months in England, Margret's father made it to the U.S. and sent for her and her mother. Because Stefan was in his senior year in high school and was offered a scholarship to Princeton, he opted to stay in Massachusetts to finish his education.

As a result of their tragic experiences, her mother became paranoid and was convinced that everyone was after her. Margret recalls one particular day when her mother came home from work shaking, because she had seen a man with a briefcase walking towards her. Margret and her mother started a search for their relatives and found out that Omi, her grandmother, was sent to a concentration camp where she passed away. And recently, Margret's cousin, Ruth, was informed that her father was gassed to death in a concentration camp after decades of investigating what had happened to him.

Margret also suffered after-effects from the Holocaust. Being Jewish made Margret insecure. She felt the need to tell anyone she had just met of her Jewish background in order to test their acceptance of her.

Margret met her future husband in New York and settled down in California, where they had three children. When her children were born, Margret taught them how to cope by themselves, so that if they were ever torn away from her, they would be able to survive. Today, Margret's three children live near her and she now has four grandchildren. With all the things she has been through, Margret has also survived breast cancer. Still healthy, she makes various trips, one of which was hiking in the Galapagos Islands. She has also been back to England and contacted Dorothy, her friend from long ago who had provided guidance. Her husband passed away 19 years ago but she still considers herself very fortunate. She has sent money towards the Darfur genocide in order to prevent a situation like hers from happening again.

Interviewing Margret has made us appreciate our lives and how fortunate we are. Margret lives her life to fullest and doesn't complain about little things. We've realized her simple but powerful thought that "hate destroys you" is true on so many levels. Hating someone just because they're different is what has led to the destruction within

countries, cities, communities, friendships and even ourselves. We hope this viciousness ends with our generation of young people.

Judith Rabbie

By Laura Nelson and Annika Flink

Serendipity

Judith Rabbie was born in Budapest, Hungary in December 1941 and lived there until 1957. From birth till the age of two she lived with both her parents as an only child. At the age of two, she was hidden in a suburb of Budapest. Her mother was born in 1915 and achieved a Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1940. She had wanted to go to medical school but was not allowed because she was Jewish. Judith's father was a Chemical Engineer and he was a director of a big textile factory.

Budapest had a very active Jewish community. Judith's mother family was very religious and active in their community. Her grandfather and some of his friends founded a Jewish high school in Budapest, which is still around today. Most of the Jews in Hungary were professionals - there were many lawyers and doctors. There were several synagogues; the main one was restored only a few years ago.

Judith did not have any knowledge of Hitler before and during the war because of her young age. However, after the war her mother talked about the German occupation often and was very clear about what Hitler did to the Jews.

As early as 1933, long before the Germans occupied Hungary, the Hungarian government sympathized with Germany. A new law, "numerous clauses" was introduced which limited the number of Jewish students to be admitted to universities and institutes of higher education. In 1939 the government established forced labor units and drafted Jewish men between the ages of 20-48. Judith's uncle was taken away in the early 1940s and was put into a work camp. His family never heard from him again.

The Germans actually occupied Hungary March 19, 1944, towards the end of the war, after they lost the battle of Stalingrad and had nothing to lose as they were pushed from the east by the Russian army and from west by the Allied Forces. The Hungarian government allied with the Germans, and formed a pro-Nazi, known as the Arrow Cross, government. The Jews were forced to wear the yellow Star of David and were forbidden from being in many public places. Judith has memories of putting the Star of David on her teddy bear.

As mentioned before, Judith's father was the director of a large textile factory. The owner of the factory was friendly towards Jews and obtained exemptions for the workers, claiming that they were essential workers so that they could hide out in the factory. He worked there for a long time until he and others were denounced as Jews.

One of her father's workers offered to take Judith by offering, "I know you have a small child and these are bad times. My wife and I would like to offer to take your child

in.” Initially, Judith’s parents rejected the offer because they wanted to keep the family together, but later, as the situation got worse they decided the best thing would be to give Judith to this couple. Judith said, “They literally gave me up to total strangers at the age of two. It never dawned on me what it meant to them until I am looking at my two year old granddaughter - what were they thinking? What courage would it take to do something like that?”

The couple would not accept any money upon taking Judith. They lived in the suburbs, with a lot of her father’s workers. Judith was only allowed to tell people her first name, never her last. For the ten months she was there she never told anyone her last name. The father of the house was from Poland, the mother was Hungarian and they had three daughters. They told others that Judith was a relative from Poland, forgetting the fact Judith looked nothing like them. Nobody ever questioned Judith’s presence. In fact, because she was a baby, the workers and their families loved to come and see her. The mother stopped working because she had to take care of the baby. Judith was treated as the couple’s fourth daughter and is still in contact with one of the daughters, who is nine years old than her. The father worked all day, but also volunteered to dig trenches for the Germans to prevent the Nazis from coming into the house. Judith describes them as “extraordinary people” and calls them her mother and father.

They lived in a very primitive area and had a very small house. It was a one bedroom house, with a small kitchen-living area combined. They housed five members of their family and three Jews in hiding. They had no running water and one outhouse. There was only one common shelter for the whole neighborhood. When the air raids occurred, everyone would run to take cover. Judith was carried to the shelter by one member of the civil defense who was later tried as a war criminal for his actions against the Jews. He never knew Judith was Jewish. When Russians came in and liberated Budapest they could tell immediately that Judith was a Jew. Since they were friends of the Jews, they actually gave Judith a doll, she remembers. Her mother took her away her doll for fear that the Russian had stolen the toy from another child.

Hungary was occupied in March 1944 and Budapest was liberated by the Russians in January 1945. Judith was in hiding for ten months. Judith did not recognize her biological mother when she came to pick her up – she thought she was just an aunt. When Judith and her mother went back to their house, it was all intact except for a damaged staircase. Her mother sold their house in 1952 because she did not want to maintain a big house.

Her mother never let Judith lose touch with the family she had lived with. Judith remembers Christmas, and other memorable occasions with her adoptive family. On Mother’s Day, both her mothers received the same present. She spent her summer vacations with the family and still has contact with the last remaining family member. She has since visited Hungary years later with her own two daughters and her mother to show the girls where she grew up. The youngest daughter in her surrogate family gave her an apartment because she wanted it to remain in the family.

It was years later that Judith would learn what had ultimately happened to her father. Her father was hiding in the factory where he worked.. He was accused by a co-worker taking a vial with poison from the laboratory and he had to go into hiding. In December 1944, Judith's father and two friends were picked up by the Germans in the very last transport that left Budapest. He was on the "death march" through Austria to the concentration camp Mauthausen. Through it all, however, her father was a valiant man. For example, during the death march, the Germans warned the Jews that anyone who fell behind would be shot immediately. One of her father's friends was sick and wanted to be left on the side of the road. Judith's father and his friends would not hear of this because they did not want him to get shot, so they carried him and his pack. After awhile, the friend indicated that he wanted to be put down, allowing the others a chance to complete the march and survive. When the Germans passed by this friend, he was very sick and looked as if he was already dead, so they just passed him. Ultimately, this man was the only one of the three that survived.

Her father, however, died on this march. After the war her mother looked for her father for years. She put ads out in newspapers to find out if anyone had seen him. She ultimately received one response from a person who survived the march." The man also stated that Judith's father had an infected wound on his leg and died on the march. He also implied that Judith's father gave up - he felt he suffered enough and was done fighting for his life. Judith said that this was a common theme during the war: people giving up their lives because they saw no point in living through the atrocities they would have to face in the hands of the Germans.

The only thing Judith has from her family is a piece of jewelry that her aunt gave her. When we asked her if she wished she had more belongings from that time, her reply was, "They are just things." However, she is very glad that she still has all her documents from that period. Sixty years later, Judith says there are still things showing up from the war. For example, she just discovered a cousin in Australia, her father's niece's daughter. Her cousin brought over a letter from Judith's father to his niece in 1941. He wrote, "I am sorry you will never see your father-in-law again. The way things are going, I doubt you will ever see me again." These letters are very valuable to her.

The Holocaust affected Judith and her family greatly. From her mother's side her aunt survived but she never talked about the war until she was much older. Her grandmother passed away just around the occupation in a convalescent hospital. Judith thought that was a blessing because that way she didn't have to find out that her son and son in law had died in the Holocaust. Her grandfather died just after the liberation of a heart attack. From her father's side her grandmother and two aunts out of five siblings survived.

Judith eventually moved to Basel, Switzerland, where she finished high school and college. Once she finished university, she went to Israel for a graduate degree and married an Englishman, with whom she had two children. In 1977, she moved to the United States. Today her younger daughter lives in Israel. Her older daughter, a veterinarian lives in Marin County with her family.

Herb Rosenbaum

By Olivia Galioto and Meagan Sharif

A Lifelong Journey

Herb Rosenbaum was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1920. Hamburg was a port city and the second largest in Germany at the time. Herb was an only child and lived with his mother and father. Just like Herb, his father was born in Hamburg, while his mother was born in Posen, Germany. His father owned a wholesale shoe company, and his mother helped with managing it. His father's company did well and he had many clients. His father was forced to transport the shoes by streetcar. His company, while well established, still barely supported his family.

Herb attended one of the most prestigious schools in Hamburg, The Gymnasium. This was a large school with no religious affiliation. Herb was one of the only Jewish students at the school. He was very bright, and the second in his class. Herb recalls one day at school his teacher saying a phrase, "If you hit my Jew, I'll hit your Jew." The teacher stopped himself before saying this comment to respect Herb's religious views. Herb found this to be a notable gesture and says he will never forget that, because even though the phrase was not necessarily demeaning, his teacher refrained from completing his thought on Herb's behalf.

Jewish life in Herb's community was vibrant. His family was not very observant, but they still attended synagogue on holidays and special occasions. Herb's family, which included his mother and father, usually an aunt or an uncle, and occasionally grandparents, often got together to have the traditional holiday dinners and celebrations. These dinners were never too extravagant, because his father's business did not leave them with much extra money or possessions.

Herb did not see much tension between the Jewish people and the non-Jewish people in his community before the war. He had non-Jewish friends, and his father sold many shoes to non-Jewish companies and men. Herb remembers that propaganda from Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda for the National Socialist Party, degrading the Jewish people and their lifestyle. Germany was in a great depression after World War I, and Hitler promised to save the people and free the Rhineland. Many people felt that Hitler would answer their prayers, causing Germany to become a thriving country once again. In 1933, the Nazi party took over.

Herb left Germany in 1937 and received an affidavit for travel from a distant relative living in San Francisco. His parents sent him on his own, and were not able to receive an affidavit, leaving Herb to travel on his own at the age of seventeen. Once he was in the United States, he was welcomed by Americans and does not remember any prejudice against him for being Jewish. His relatives sent him to work in a greenhouse in Salinas so he could support himself. At the greenhouse, he received \$35 a month. The

conditions at the greenhouse were harsh. Many of the men were shoved into small rooms and they had little space, working from sunrise until sunset in the fields. His relatives came out to visit him and witnessed his horrible living conditions. They felt guilty for sending him to Salinas and immediately brought him back home with them. Once in San Francisco again, he washed windows for big buildings. The work was better, easier to find, and he made more money working under better conditions.

Eventually, his parents received their affidavits to immigrate to America less than a year after he had left Germany. His mother and father were to be on one of the last ships to leave Germany before the Nazi party was at its most powerful. Unfortunately, Herb's father died of a heart attack just before the ship was to leave Germany. This left Herb's mom to travel across an ocean alone to come to America. Once Herb's mom arrived in San Francisco, their relatives helped them find an apartment that Herb could afford. Herb took a job at a plumbing supplies company, which he held until 1971.

Herb's mother was active in the Jewish community in San Francisco. Many German immigrants were often at her home. She would serve them proper kosher meals, which was rare in San Francisco at the time. With this she was able to make money to help support her son and herself. Herb and his mother made many new friends and often listened to their stories about how they left Germany.

Herb married his wife, Ilse. They moved to San Carlos, and had a son at the age of thirty-five. Herb's mother moved to a house across the street from them and lived there until she passed away. Herb and his wife are both involved in many charities. Herb sits on the Board of Directors for the Sequoia Hospital Foundation. They give back to their community in many ways, and are very proud of their country. An American flag hangs in the front of their as a symbol of their gratitude to be American.

Assemblymember Mike Feuer
District 42



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Natalie Gold

Interviewed by Jessica Rode & Anastasia
Gavrilenko

Alan Goldstein

Interviewed by Kelly Specia

Irwin Goldstein

Interviewed by Aaron Feuer & Brianna
Kaufman

Sally Marco

Interviewed by Peter Atkinson & Gabriela
Leslie

Luba Rostovsky

Interviewed by Jason Rostovsky

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Natalie Gold

By Jessica Rode and Anastasia Gavrilenko

Can you imagine if the entire population of Washington State was murdered, just because of their religion? In 1945, six million Jews were murdered, the equivalent to the number of residents in Washington State. Unfortunately there were not many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, and even fewer are still alive today. One of the few is Natalie Gold. Natalie was born in 1940, after the war had already begun. She was born in Radzymin, Poland. Before Natalie was born the town was a thriving Jewish community, but unfortunately shortly after her birth, the town became a ghetto. Fortunately, her father had already begun working with the underground and had insight that the town was going to be destroyed. 14,000 people were killed in Radzymin, ending the lively past of the town. Natalie explains, “the Holocaust did not just kill Jewish people, it killed [the] whole culture.” Fortunately, her father managed to smuggle Natalie and her mother out of the town before it was invaded and the people were sent to the concentration camps. However, Natalie only spoke Yiddish and therefore was a dead giveaway that her parents were Jewish, who had nowhere left to hide her. So they left her on the door step of a lawyer with a sign that begged for protection and care for the child in the name of Christ. The lawyer took the child to a police station where she was passed on to a convent and then to several other ones, where Natalie was raised until her father found her at age five.

Natalie’s only memories of the convent consist of always being cold and hungry. She remembers always hiding her food, because she did not know if she had another meal coming. She also remembers going to what she now knows were funerals. She says, “Over sixty percent of the children died of malnutrition.” When her father finally found her after an exhausting bike ride over all of Poland, Natalie still would put food away even though it was now unnecessary. For Natalie it was not only difficult to learn who her father was, but to learn that she was Jewish after being raised in a Christian convent for the beginning portion of her life.

Since Natalie was born during the war, she did not know life in any other way, but she says that even as a small child she knew something was wrong when buildings would be in ruins as she walked down the street. She remembers that the building that she lived in with her father in Poland was the only building on the street that was not totally destroyed. When Natalie was seven years old, she moved to Paris with her father where together they began to rebuild their lives. Ever since then they have both fought discrimination by spreading awareness of the damages that discrimination could do to the world, and the cultures it could destroy.

Alan Goldstein

By Kelly Specca

“Remember You Are Jewish, Don’t Forget You Are”

“Remember You Are Jewish, Don’t Forget You Are.” As Mr. Goldstein was leaving his family to be hidden in a small Lithuanian farm, these words were left to him as his mother, father and brother moved from town to town to escape persecution from the Nazis. Mr. Goldstein has the courage to remember his past and to share with others a past that changed and shaped his entire life.

Mr. Goldstein was born in 1935 and raised in the small Lithuanian town of Erzvilig where he lived with his father, mother and brother. His grandfather and father made a good living by selling grain and cattle. Life was comfortable in Erzvilig, and while many people were Catholic; two hundred Jewish people lived in Erzvilig as well. Many people were very anti-Semitic in the town. Before the Germans took over Erzvilig, there were many rumors going around town against the Jewish people once the Nazis took control. Mr. Goldstein’s father, however, was good friends since childhood with the current chief of police in the town and felt protected. The police chief did not relay any information to Mr. Goldstein’s father, but the chief’s mother told Mr. Goldstein’s father that “I don’t think it’s going to be very good for the Jews, plan on escaping.” Mr. Goldstein’s father initially did not believe this warning. In June and July 1941, the Germans invaded Lithuania and occupied Erzvilig where the Nazis enlisted the Lithuanian police to seal up the town exits and placed heavier restrictions on the Jewish people. They were forced to wear the yellow Star of David symbol on their clothing identifying them as Jews. Mr. Goldstein remembers as a child being fascinated by the color of the star on his mother and father’s shirts. The Lithuanian police told the Jews to pack up what they could carry and move from their houses into the slum part of town. Mr. Goldstein and his family shared a room with many other families, where it soon became extremely overcrowded and uncomfortable. Before moving into these slum houses, Mr. Goldstein and his family had experienced electricity and indoor plumbing. The unsuspecting Jews did not know that there was a mass grave outside of town awaiting them. Mr. Goldstein’s father and mother soon became very suspicious of what was going to happen to the Jews. The police then told the Jews that they should prepare for a three-day journey where they would be moved to a camp. People began to make food for the journey and wear their best clothes because they thought they were just relocating to another part of town. Mr. Goldstein’s father again remembered the advice of the police chief’s mother and knew they needed to get out. Before the town became heavily guarded, Mr. Goldstein’s father escaped into the forest to find hiding for him and his family. He told his wife to meet him in the forest in three days with the children. Mrs. Goldstein decided that she would escape during one of the town’s bazaars, where many people came from other towns and it would be easier to blend in with the crowd. The guards stopped her trying to exit the bazaar several times, but she never gave up. Mrs. Goldstein brought a potty for her two children and a small cutting knife for fruits

and acted as if she was going on a walk with her children. She finally made her way out of the town by going through the cemetery where no one was watching her and met up with her husband in the forest. Within three days of the Goldstein's escape all of the Jews in Erzvilig were killed. Only ten Jews escaped the massacre, the Goldstein family, another family of four and a couple. Mr. Goldstein's grandparents, relatives and friends were all killed by the Germans. Mr. Goldstein was told that his grandmother fell into the grave alive with other dead Jews and suffocated.

Not knowing their fate, the Goldstein family became very resourceful and lived off the land. Because it was summer many berries and other natural resources were abundant in the forest. They now had only one thing on their mind, to survive. Throughout that summer, Mr. Goldstein, who was about age six, and his family moved around the forest. Since his father knew many farmers in the area, he would ask farmers for food, some were nice while others threatened to call the Nazis. The Goldstein family continued to live off the land along with the occasional hand-out by the farmers of bread and cheese, but no meat because they did not want to draw attention by making a fire. Throughout trying to survive, the Goldstein family tried to keep with their modern Orthodox Jewish traditions to eat kosher. Only when it was purely a necessity to survive did they break that promise. Mr. Goldstein admits the one thing he could never eat was raw eggs and to this day he only eats eggs when they are over cooked. The family continued to move and used their cleverness and resourcefulness to survive. The family moved to another location towards the highway which was next to a forest. Instead of running deep into the forest like others would do, the clever family situated themselves in the 6th or 7th tree along the highway. The large pine tree provided shelter and excellent hiding. The spare branches lying around the forest were used as makeshift beds. During the winter months, life was especially hard, but the Goldsteins remained a family and never lost hope. For warmth, they would bundle up, wearing all of their clothes and melt the snow for drinking water. It was very difficult to live in a forest, especially for Mr. Goldstein and his brother, who were still small children. Due to the intense cold, Mr. Goldstein's foot became temporarily paralyzed. From obstacle to obstacle, Mr. Goldstein and his family remained a strong and loving family who never lost hope against all odds. Mr. Goldstein's father would sneak out of the forest every couple of weeks to get food for his family.

A farmer provided the Goldstein family with a good hiding place by letting him live in his barn. Since all the floors were made out of dirt, the farmer and his wife made a small crevice under their stove for the Goldstein family to hide under. Unfortunately, when the German patrol came, they found the crevice. Mr. Goldstein's father, mother and brother had to leave the barn for safety, leaving Mr. Goldstein behind because he had the measles. He was afraid the German soldiers would look under the sheet and see that he was circumcised, but the soldier just felt his head and said, "You are very sick." Mr. Goldstein was left alone because the Germans were very afraid of catching diseases. Mr. Goldstein's father returned for his son and with the help of another farmer's pity moved into his barn for shelter. The farmer created space for them in a corner of the barn and covered it with hay. Towards the entrance of the barn was the farmer's guard dog that got along with Goldstein family. The dog provided some security for the family because

no one would cross the dog guard and hence not see the family. Mr. Goldstein remembers liking the dog because it brought back memories of his dog in Erzvilig, who was named Fido. One day the German patrol came wanting poultry and other animals for food. When they came into the barn, the guard dog attacked the soldier, the soldier was going to shoot the dog, but if he missed he might have killed the Goldstein family. The farmer's wife pleaded with the soldier who put back his gun, but discovered the Goldstein family. Before the guards tied up Mr. Goldstein's mother and father they decided to make a run for it. Mr. Goldstein's mother went one way, while Mr. Goldstein's father went towards a field. A German soldier shot Mr. Goldstein's father in the back of the head and left him unconscious. The soldier dragged Mr. Goldstein's unconscious father back and tied him and his wife and children in the wagon. Since, it was winter and the mud was so thick, the Germans decided to cut through the river passing, but the water was so high it almost drowned Mr. Goldstein and his brother if they didn't stand up on their parent's laps. During this time in the war, many Jews had already been killed and it was somewhat of a novelty for the Germans to find Jews still in hiding. As the wagon passed through a town, people lined the streets to see Mr. Goldstein and his family, amazed that there were any Jews left. The Germans took Mr. Goldstein and his family to a jail where other regular criminals were kept. Mr. Goldstein says he remembers the shower system at the jail. He said in the bathroom there was a row of sinks and a huge drainage system in the middle of the room. The shower heads looked like bird feeders where the water would all come down at you at once. Mr. Goldstein's parents soon began to tell the other criminals what the Germans had really been doing to the Jews, which made the prisoners extremely unruly. The Germans realized this was not the atmosphere for a family and moved them to a small part of a compound which was one of the head SS headquarters in the area. The Goldstein family was used as a ploy to entice other Jews to come out of hiding so the Germans could imprison them in the compound like the Goldstein family. Mr. Goldstein was guarded and forced to work as a servant for the SS soldiers. He was hit in the head everyday by one of seven soldiers as a test to see if he cried or screamed and if he did, it gave them a reason to kill him. Mr. Goldstein, his brother and mother were not guarded, but were detained in a room. Mr. Goldstein said they could have escaped, but the Germans told them if they did they would kill his father. The Germans told his father that if he escaped, they would kill his children and wife. Jews who were still in hiding were able to sneak notes to the Goldstein family and asked if it was really safe to come out, but the Goldstein family said, "no, they were waiting to be killed." Mr. Goldstein's father's resourcefulness came into play again. Knowing that eventually the Germans would kill his family, he told the soldiers in the compound that this was the town where some of his relatives had lived and that they buried money and their gold in the backyard and he could find it for them. Playing on the soldier's greed along with labor work, Mr. Goldstein's father went into the town and searched for the treasure, which was able to buy some time to escape by searching for something that never existed. One day at the compound, an accident involving the death of German soldiers in a nearby town occurred and gave the Goldstein family the perfect opportunity to escape. All of the soldiers left, warning Mr. Goldstein's father not to escape. The Goldstein family, like they did before, escaped by going to one of the town bazaars and getting lost among the crowds of people. Mr. Goldstein's father recognized a farmer at the bazaar and asked for help to get out of

town. Since, the Germans were going to be looking for a family of four with two small boys, Mr. Goldstein's father decided to split the family up. The fact that Mr. Goldstein could speak fluent Lithuanian, which would distract people from thinking he was Jewish even though he had red hair, allowed his father to send him with the farmer he met at the bazaar. The farmer at the bazaar had a relative who Mr. Goldstein could stay with. Mr. Goldstein's father and mother took his little brother with them since he spoke Lithuanian with a Yiddish accent and dressed him up as a girl since he had curly blonde hair.

Mr. Goldstein was age seven when he lived with the farmer's family. He remained with the farmer and his family from the bazaar until everything calmed down. Mr. Goldstein admits that his parents and brother had it worse because they were constantly on the run. After hearing that the Goldstein family escaped the compound, the Germans put a high price on the Goldstein family. The farmer from the bazaar pulled Mr. Goldstein on a sleigh to look like he was giving his child a ride in the snow and transported him to his relatives' farm in another town. Mr. Goldstein said he was loved and treated just like one of the farmer's six children. The farmer was very poor and Mr. Goldstein remembers looking at the big cooking pot on the stove and seeing roaches line the pot and the farmer's wife just wiping them off. Mr. Goldstein says he was bathed, clothed and shared a bed with the other six children. The farmer's family was Catholic and went to church every Sunday. Mr. Goldstein recalls that the first time he went to Church; he got sprinkled with holy water by the priest and was forced to kiss Jesus' feet. He hesitated before he kissed Jesus' feet because he felt uncomfortable remembering his Jewish faith but the farmer told him if he did not do it, it would bring suspicion upon him and they would all be killed. The farmer told Mr. Goldstein that the first time German patrol came around he would say he was a relative visiting, but the second time the German patrol came he was to run into the forest to hide. He also warned Mr. Goldstein about making sure that when he went to the bathroom that no one would see that he was circumcised. The first time the German patrol came to town, the soldiers bought the story about Mr. Goldstein being a relative; the second time the Germans patrol came, Mr. Goldstein ran into the forest for safety. It was summer and Mr. Goldstein, still a young child, survived by following the rabbits and watching what they ate, then he would eat the same. He stayed in the forest for three days, until the farmer came looking for him. Towards the end of his stay with the farmer's family, the war began to look increasingly bad for the Germans because the Russians were defeating them. Although the Germans still offered a high reward for the Goldstein family the Russians were more interested in their own soldiers and offered rewards for people hiding Russian soldiers, and did not care about someone aiding Jews. In 1945, the war was over and Mr. Goldstein did not know if his parents were still alive and his parents and brother did not know if he was still alive. His father began looking at all the farms Mr. Goldstein might have been sent. A month later his father found Mr. Goldstein, who was about ten or eleven years old by then and united him with his brother and mother. After the Goldstein family finally came out of hiding, Russian soldiers detained them for about a month because they believed they were German spies because the Yiddish language sounded like German to the Russians. While in jail, Mr. Goldstein saw a Russian soldier who looked to be Jewish. After he told him his story they were eventually released. After the war, Jewish people were still being assigned to various DP (displaced persons) camps to be relocated and

start new lives. Mr. Goldstein's father sold animals in the camps while his mother, brother and he made and sold ice cream. The Goldstein family tried to go to a relative in South Africa but was unsuccessful because of the quota restricting the number of Holocaust survivors into the country. After moving from DP camps, Mr. Goldstein's father decided to go to California to live with a relative. Mr. Goldstein and his family still remain in California and have three children and ten grandchildren. His parents and brother are still alive. Mr. Goldstein saw the Holocaust through a child's eye and was robbed of his innocence. The Nazis took the Goldstein's possessions, but the one thing they could never take was the eternal bond of family and tradition which is forever rooted in the Goldstein family.

A Lithuanian proverb states, "A Person Who Gives Is a Person who has." Mr. Goldstein not only shared his personal story with me, but has made a profound impression on the way I will view and live the rest of my life. Mr. Goldstein and his wife are the perfect examples of people who strive to make a difference everyday. I believe tolerance and hate are like a disease: both can be spread, all types of people can be susceptible to it. In my lifetime and in my parent's lifetime there has been untold sorrow and hatred in this world, but if one person, one government, one world can bring tolerance, we could end this culture of war and death to bring a culture of peace. Tolerance is a right we all have as citizens of the world; we should demand, preach and share it because it is the virtue that makes peace possible.

Irwin Goldstein

By Aaron Feuer and Brianna Kaufman

"We Left the Soldiers in Tears"

In 1926, Irwin Goldstein was born Armin Goldstein, the youngest of eight children. He grew up in a predominantly Ukrainian area of Czechoslovakia in a small village called Vlachovo. Although there were only about thirty-five other Jewish families in this village, Irwin felt free to practice his religion; he and his family were Orthodox Jews who attended their local synagogue twice a day. His father, also a native of Vlachovo, ran a general store patronized by community members of all religions. Irwin lived a childhood generally free from open anti-Semitism.

Irwin praises the democratic government of Czechoslovakia that he originally grew up under, but the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia beginning in 1938 and 1939 disrupted the peace in his village. Vlachovo was originally occupied by Hungarian forces. In an initial act of disrespect toward the Jewish community, the Nazis immediately processed all Jews in the village on Saturday, *Shabbat*, the weekly day of rest in Judaism. Conditions worsened as the government enforced anti-Jewish laws that removed Irwin from public school and forced his father to close the family's store. In 1940, the Nazis began sending Jews from Irwin's community to labor camps.

By 1941, Hitler's relations with Stalin had shattered, and Jews were conscripted to serve on the front lines, clearing minefields. Amongst these soldiers on the Russian front were Irwin's three older brothers, who were never seen or heard from again. Later that year, fifteen-and-a-half years old, Irwin was sent to work as a lumberjack. He labored under relatively lax security, and after a few months he ran away to live on his own in Budapest. Once there, he took any job that would help him survive, and Jewish organizations in the city supported him. Shortly thereafter, in 1943, Irwin made his way back home. The relatively "easy" years under Hungarian rule were about to come to a screeching halt.

In 1944, Hitler's Germany took over Hungary's rule of Czechoslovakia and instituted stricter policies to eliminate and suppress the Jewish people. Irwin was initially sent to a ghetto, Munkacs, for a few weeks before being transferred to Auschwitz. After he was "processed" at the concentration camp, Irwin heeded the advice of long-time prisoners to leave the camp any way possible. He seized an opportunity to work as a carpenter helping to construct another camp. Irwin had only been at Auschwitz three days before he went to East Germany to work. He helped build barracks – in his words, simple "huts" – that would come to house some three thousand of Hitler's victims.

In January of 1945, Irwin was suddenly led on a two week "death march" through Germany, surviving on inadequate food during miserable weather. Throughout the journey, he could hear shooting in the distance as the Russians pressed westward.

Eventually, soldiers herded Irwin and others who survived the march into open-car trains. He recalls cheering the Allied bombers as they attacked nearby German targets, though the guards often ran off from the trains as bombers approached, fearful that the railroad cars could be targets.

Irwin's final destination was the Nazi death camp Bergen-Belsen. There, with a shortage of burial space, he was forced to dig ditches in which the guards would burn the bodies of his fellow prisoners. In addition to the camp's infamous extermination chambers, hunger, typhoid, dysentery, and tuberculosis claimed the lives of thousands. Irwin was afflicted with all of them, and his health began to take a toll. During a 3 A.M. roll-call one day, Irwin collapsed out of hunger and exhaustion. Dumped into a mass grave and left for dead, he summoned the strength to climb out, barely alive. Regaining strength was difficult as the prisoners' primary meal was a sour soup of flour and water.

Though Irwin's condition was bleak, he could tell the Germans knew their reign of terror was coming to an end. Irwin recalls a German officer leaving his gun on a table to "watch" Irwin and fellow internees while they worked. The guard declared that he was going to take a nap and that the prisoners would soon be guarding *him*.

The officer was right. In April of 1945, British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen. Irwin was eighteen years old but weighed just seventy-five pounds. He recalls hardened British soldiers left in tears at the cruelty of the camp. Of his immediate family, only Irwin and his sister survived, and his sister never recovered emotionally.

After a brief stay in a makeshift hospital the Allies established at Bergen-Belsen, Irwin was sent to a Swedish hospital. He recalls the touching generosity of the Swedish people: they went out of their way to treat him well in the hospital, and strangers visited him bearing gifts. As he regained strength, he explored immigrating to Israel, but a representative of the country discouraged him because he was not strong enough yet. Irwin remained in the hospital for two years. After being released, he attended night school in Sweden, married his first wife, and had his first child. In late 1948, he left for America.

Settling in New York was difficult at first, but as a fast learner with a strong memory, Irwin found a job with an automated machine company. By his hard work he rose through the company's ranks, working there for eighteen years before moving to the west coast. Irwin and his adoring wife live happily in Beverly Hills as proud great-grandparents.

Sally Marco

By Peter Atkinson and Gabriela Leslie

Sally Marco invited us into her roomy apartment in West Los Angeles. One would never know from looking at the petite and active woman the hardships she was about to recount and the courage it took to get through them.

Born on the Polish independence day of November 11, 1923 in Łódź, Poland, she grew up with her mother, Esther, and her father, Isaac Landowicz, in a household of nine children. The early part of her life was spent in relative peace; her pious father ran a government tobacco store while she and her siblings attended a Jewish religious school. However, her life of contentment began to melt away as she grew older.

Sally still clearly remembers, even after 68 years, the day the German army and Gestapo marched into Łódź at 5:00 PM on September 6th, 1939. Harsh restrictions were promulgated. Anything of value was confiscated without compensation, only some of it being re-rationed.

“I remember that we had just gotten a new bicycle in the summer and we had to bring it in and give it up,” Sally recalls.

As German dignitaries began to move into Poland, even housing was confiscated to accommodate them, leaving large unacquainted Jewish families crammed into small tenements. Jewish schools were shut down, and libraries were closed to Jews, leaving the children with no access to education. Soon after, Jews were refused tickets to theatres and cinemas. Being shut out of the community left the Jews with virtually no forms of entertainment. If the deterioration of Jewish liberty was not bad enough, the tobacco store that was run by Sally’s father was liquidated and the family struggled with finances, living off of inadequate government rations.

“It became very difficult to live this way, especially when the children did not go to school anymore,” she said.

But Jewish losses were more than material. Sally had a Catholic friend who lived in a neighboring apartment. The two became close and would walk to school together. Sally remembers helping the girl with her math homework almost every day, and being the only Jew ever invited to her house for Christmas dinner. However, once the Germans moved into Łódź, the girl refused to acknowledge Sally any longer. The loss of this friendship was devastating to Sally.

Sally painfully recounts this memory. “I think I don’t remember her name because I wanted her out of my mind. Not that I hated her, but I was very, very disappointed... if I was walking north to south and she was walking south to north and

we almost faced each other, she would turn her head away. She did not even want to say hello to me or acknowledge that she had seen me.”

Sally could not take life any longer, and escaped Łódź to travel to Russian-controlled Poland at the age of sixteen. She left her family with few belongings and hopped a train to Warsaw. Through just a little luck, the train arrived five minutes before the German Gestapo arrived at the train station where she would have been arrested. She did not know anyone in Warsaw, but due to recent bombardment there were many empty buildings in which to spend the night. The next morning, she caught another train to a small lake that separated German-controlled Poland from Russian-controlled Poland. She paid for a trip across in a small boat. However, the man who rowed the boat for her tricked her into leaving her backpack in a sheltered building on the other side of the lake, claiming the walk would be too difficult with her backpack on. However, Sally’s mom had hidden some money in a soap bar for her, and Sally managed to take it with her without the man suspecting. By pure chance, Sally met a Russian woman in town who had had a friend on the same street on which Sally used to live. The woman was able to find Sally a room, and soon after Sally was hired as a waitress.

“The Russians weren’t so great, but at least they weren’t killing people.” Sally said.

Despite the success in her journey, Sally felt pangs of homesickness and guilt for leaving her family in poverty. She had no communication with them during the course of her excursion. She decided to return to Warsaw, but when her mom tried to take a carriage to meet her, she was intercepted by the Germans and stripped of her belongings. Sally knew then that she had no choice but to return to Łódź.

By early January, all of the Jews in the city were forced to relocate into the Litzmannstadt ghetto, and by mid-April, it was surrounded by electric fencing. Living in the ghetto was a time of extreme poverty and hunger. Sally usually worked eight hour days ironing soldier’s pants, and sometimes would be forced to work the night shift as well. The daily rations often ran out quickly, and in order to receive them one had to stand in line for hours. This often left the people who worked during the day without any food for days. Famine was rampant in the ghetto.

“There were these young boys who were walking the streets holding onto the walls,” Sally said. “Their legs didn’t work anymore. They were just walking on the streets of Poland and dying.”

Crammed housing, oppression of liberty, confiscation of all belongings and starvation became the new status quo. Some people even resorted to measures as desperate as murdering acquaintances for food. Sally told a story of a young, well-educated boy who was so desperate from hunger he even murdered his girlfriend’s sister for her bread. If that was not bad enough, all of the Jews in the ghetto were forced to witness his hanging.

“Those things, you think it’s nothing, but this remains with you all your life,” sighed Sally. “Such cruel ideas that they had. They force[d] you to see it.”

She remained with her family in the ghetto until she was 21 years old. That year, all the factories were shut down and Jews no longer had any means of income. Carts began arriving to take people to concentration camps. Friends and family were taken by the Germans.

“That’s what happened in the ghetto. One day people would just disappear,” Sally commented.

On August 27th, 1944, Sally was taken to Auschwitz with her mother, father and four sisters, and it was there she remained until October 1944. The period spent in Auschwitz was the darkest period of her life. Her hair was shaved, she was separated from her brother and father, and she was forced to work for hours under the blazing sun performing arduous, menial tasks. They were woken up at four or five in the morning and forced to walk miles past the barracks to carry heavy pots of “coffee” (or yellowish water made from the leftovers of German coffee grounds), back to the barracks where they slept. Even when they finally made it back, the women in charge would not give the coffee to the Jews to drink, but rather turned over the pots and scrubbed the floors with the contents. The starvation was even worse than in the ghettos. Every day was lived in fear, because Dr. Mengele would patrol down the lines of women and separate them into two lines: one line would live, and one would be sent to the crematorium. One never knew what he would be looking for that day, or if it would be you that was picked. Even one of Sally’s blonde, blue-eyed sisters was picked, to her family’s horror. Sally’s mom took the hand of the sister, and insisted on going with her. Sally never saw either again, despite being told they were merely being taken to work in a match factory.

One particular day is branded into Sally’s memory. A German woman with her hair in rollers and in a long robe came knocking on all the doors of Sally’s barrack one night, forcing the Jews to walk outside and look at the sky, which was filled with hellish smoke from the crematorium.

“She walked over and said, ‘You all go out and watch how your parents and your families are being burned.’ And we looked at that fire and you thought you were seeing the faces of your loved ones,” Sally recalled.

The only means of using the toilet during the night was a grimy pail in the back of the barrack, and many times it was full and Sally had to walk throughout the barracks to empty it. Life, if it can even be called so, in Auschwitz was so horrendous that Sally was tempted to throw herself into the electric wires surrounding the camp in an attempt to escape the misery of it all.

Sally describes, “Many times when I was sitting at night on that pail, right in front of me, in the back of that barrack, were the electric wires. I could hear the wires talk to me, ‘Come out, come over.’ And I said to myself, ‘Oh, I can’t go there, what’s going to

happen to my sisters? I have to be with my sisters.’ And that’s how we lived through together. Because if not for one another, to give support, we would not be here.”

It was only due to the strength of familial bonds that gave Sally and her sisters the strength to survive. To this day, Sally lives in the same building as her sisters. Finally, Sally and her sisters were moved from Auschwitz to Chemnitz, and from there to Oederan, where they worked at an ammunition factory. After working in the ammunition factory for some time, they were taken on a train on April 21st and arrived in the Theresienstadt ghetto on April 27th, 1945. Sally was very ill at the time, and so weak that she could not even walk. Her sisters supported her, one on either side, in order for her to walk to the train. No one even knew they were her sisters, because otherwise, they would have been separated.

On May 9th, 1945, the Jews were liberated in Theresienstadt. Sally and her sisters stayed there for a period and Sally remembers leaving the ghetto for one day to see Prague. The people there, recognizing Sally and her sisters as concentration camp survivors, showed extraordinary kindness, and their train conductor refused to accept payment.

“There were two students walking... so they took us around, showed us Prague, walked with us, took us dancing... These were their words: ‘In this day, we have to give you back what you lost in those six years,’” Sally said.

That evening, the students took them to nun’s quarters where they were able to stay the night. In another visit to Czechoslovakia, this time to Loboschovice, the city’s mayor obtained food for them from a local jail because the rations office was closed.

“Then they located us in a palace, we offered to work there, a gorgeous park, a gorgeous park. So we said we would work, we used to clean up and things like that, but we lived in the palace,” Sally remembers. “The people of Czechoslovakia were just unbelievably nice,” a strong contrast from the terrible conditions and cruelty of the times.

Later, Sally and her sisters were taken to Landsberg Am Lech, a displaced persons camp in Germany. There Sally met and married her husband. She and her sisters learned also that their brother had died only ten days after he was liberated from a camp, when he caught a bad cold while walking back from Poland to Germany, escorted by the Nazis. One by one, Sally and her sisters made their way to the United States. Sally’s husband had relatives in Chicago, so he and Sally made their way there. Sally learned English by going to night school, and found a low paying job despite knowing almost no English. After a few years in Chicago, they moved to Los Angeles, where her husband opened a business, and there they stayed. Sadly, her husband passed away in 2000, but Sally has been living in Los Angeles for 52 years, committed to her loving family of a son, daughter and six grandchildren. She is a member of the 1939 Club, and fervently believes in the exposure of young people to the stories of the Holocaust. “This should never be forgotten,” she says. “These stories prove that the Holocaust was true.”

A sensitive, intelligent and articulate woman, Sally now lives in a building with two of her sisters. Her life, which has been marked both by fear and oppression as well as great kindness, is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and is an example of what we can all try to be.

Luba Rostovsky

By Jason Rostovsky

My name is Luba Rostovsky. I was born in Poland in 1928. I lived in a family of five. My father was named Itzhak Pomerantz, he owned a barbershop in our town, Hoducishki, a small, but beautiful town with hundreds of stores and crowded with kind people. Everyone knew one another by their names. There was a magnificent lake that we would go swimming in during summer, and during winter when the lake would freeze, we would put on our skates and set off on the blinding white ice to skate. It was wonderful. Then there was my mother, Leah, who was a typical housewife. My brother, Chakel, who was four years older than I. Then there was my sister Sarah, who was two years older than I. They were students. They all died during the war. We had a huge house. It was brand new, as was everything in the house. It had been built one year before World War II.

Everything in the house was big and bright, it's as vivid as ever to me. We all had separate bedrooms. The house was perfect, but at the beginning of the war we were forced to leave it and practically everything in it except for what we could carry. When the war started I was only eleven years old. My childhood had been a good one. We were well-off, and I had been a little spoiled. If I had wanted anything at all, I got it. All I had to do was ask. I remember when my mother took me to a larger city so that my glasses' frames could be made of gold. I had played the mandolin, and I was quite good at it. Just like my brother and sister, I had gone to school. My day consisted of going to school, and then going to learn needle point at a lady's house. I was simple. We were just a normal family. We had a steady lady who would come to take care of the cleaning and washing.

When we heard the Germans were coming to our town in 1939 we took whatever we could carry on the long trek we knew we had ahead of us, and shut the door behind us. We took the keys and hoped that one day, when all the chaos had ended, we could return to this place called home. But sadly, it never happened.

We hopped onto a small wagon. We were cramped in, barely any room for our legs or arms. The wagon took us away, and we came to a forest. It was night, and we all slept on the cold hard ground. As we tried to sleep, we could hear the horrible shouting from far away. The shouting of all the people being pulled out of their homes. Their lives falling apart, knowing that they may never return to how their lives were before. We started walking. Eventually, we came to a train station where thousands of people were fighting with each other, desperately trying to push themselves onto the trains.

After a struggle, we made it onto the train. Taking the train was very risky, because the Germans bombed the trains, killing many people. I saw something I never thought I would. Mothers were pushing their kids onto the trains, fighting with each other, acting as they never had before. Many of them didn't make it on themselves, and lost their children whom they never saw again. We had no clue where we were going or

what we would face next. Finally, the train had stopped. It could go no further, and again we walked for days. I was exhausted but I knew this was just the beginning. Then we came to a small town.

There was another train, filled with people as previously, but we made it on. We arrived at another small town, hundreds of miles away from home, away from the war zone. Every resident here was poor, dressed in rags and covered in dirt. The men were all in the war, but the women with their children were still there. They were very nice, despite their current housing and financial conditions. So far, the war had not made them any different. A family took us in. They were kind enough to share their food with us. It wasn't much, but we were thankful. A meal would be made of potatoes and a small piece of bread, but as long as we were under a roof, that was more than good for us. We lived there for four months, then we heard news that the German army started to move closer. We ran.

We traveled for miles and caught another train that was overfilled with refugees. We came to Central Asia, to the Uzbek Republic. We slept in the filthy streets with the rats and trash. After a little while, another kind family took us in, and we were there for only a couple of weeks. My father got very ill and he passed away. We did not know how he died, maybe it was from a heart attack. A month later, my mother became ill. They took her to a village hospital. It was full, two people per hospital bed due to the city crowded with refugees and most of them were sick. The streets were filled with refugees. People were lying on the sidewalk with torn clothes. They had neither food nor water and about ninety-nine percent of them were out of their minds.

There was no hope for them, no one could help them because even the people in homes, the ones who had lived there all their lives, were starving as well. The women left, without their men, could not take care of all these refugees. The lucky ones were taken in, and we were lucky enough to be treated to a crowded home, and small portions of food. People lost their families, children separated from their parents. It was horrific. The war had changed people. They became like animals, lacking human emotions and instincts. They attacked each other, and were hogging food and stealing things. These people not only lost everything they had, their homes, their families, and their lives, but they had also all lost their minds. In 2 months I lost my brother.

He fell in the street from hunger and died. They buried him in a hole. The next day I saw dogs pull his body out of the hole. I really don't know what happened to his body but, there were thousands like this. I was left with my sister in the street. Because the lady who we were staying with before passed away and we had to leave her house, we both were sleeping on the streets with no food, no shelter and no mother or father. No family, the only thing that was good was that in Uzbekistan it is not so cold.

Then my sister was struck with illness. She had dysentery. They took us to a "so called" hospital. They felt bad for me, and let me stay in the hospital in a small bed with Sarah. Every day, we were given a small piece of bread to eat. I ate mine right away but Sarah could not. She was so ill that she couldn't eat hers. She would hide her piece under

her pillow. But I was so hungry during the middle of the night, my stomach churning, begging for one full course meal, I would steal her bread. She did not want me to, but I could not help it. Hunger was what brought out the worst in a person during this time. It changed people.

She would scream at me, yelling for me not to take her bread. She wouldn't give me her bread. At night, I would lay awake. Hungry. I would think, maybe my sister would die soon and I will have her bread. Hunger makes a person become an animal. You lose your feelings, all of them. Shortly after, my sister passed away. I was left alone, no one to take care of me. No one to say one good word to me, or to shelter me. There were thousands of people like me, lying in the streets. Just like me. Alone. Hungry. Scared. It is very hard to overcome hunger, but not to have a parent, or a family, was the worst thing. I had come from a very close family. We respected each other. Everyone loved everyone. I never knew what it meant to have a grandmother, or a grandfather, or to be loved by them. I knew, just for a short time, my parents, and I had missed their love.

I didn't have shoes, or a jacket. No tooth brush, or soap. No bed to sleep in. When Sarah was still alive, I had sat in the streets, begging. It was so good, and it meant so much. I had lost all my dignity. I felt shame. I only dreamt of bread. I used to go to a small mill where they made flour, but the people never allowed me to take any. They only let me take the dust that the flour left. I used to scrape away as much of the dust that I could and I would mix it with water in a dirty can. This was my meal. It tasted so good.

From time to time, I would go to where they kept horses, and they would give me some horse food. I didn't know what it was, but to me it tasted really good. This was what I had to eat. I had to take anything I could find to survive. I had to live like this for a couple of years. Eventually a lady took me in. I helped her around the house and she shared her food with me. Whatever she had. Her husband was killed in the war, and she needed me as much as I needed her. We were each other's support. We kept each other company, and she helped with my loneliness and to cope with the loss of my whole family, and she fed me.

After the war, I wrote a letter to my relatives, who were already back home in Poland. They told me to come to them. The government helped the people who were able to travel, to get home. Finally, I came home to Poland. I went to school, and finished the tenth grade. I worked in an office for fifteen years. I was always a good worker. I knew bookkeeping. I kept files in order for 130 workers that I knew in the office. Eventually I met a wonderful man, Meier Rostovsky.

I met him at my cousin's house in Poland. He had been in a prison camp in Siberia, Russia for ten years because he was a Zionist. When the war was over, he was freed from the prison camp. After this, he went to his brother's house in Poland. I didn't know him before the war, but fate brought us together. My cousin and he were neighbors. My cousin saw him through the window, and told me that she had someone for me and introduced us. We couldn't wait to get married, not even a year, so we got married right away. He wanted to go to Israel, so we had to marry in Poland because he wasn't a Polish

citizen. He was born in Lithuania. So we married and came to Israel in 1954. We were there for four years, and then my aunt sent us papers to come to America. We came to America in 1962, and now I live with my wonderful daughter, Sarah, and her husband Armand. I also have a son, Itzhak, and his wife, Peggy, and four grandchildren.

Everyday I thank God for everything. I lost my family in the war, but being who I am, I rebuilt a new family. I have my children, and my grandchildren and they are my life. I had no one to take care of me, so every day, I take care of them so that they never have to feel what I felt, or go through what I went through. And whatever I had done, I did it all by myself. Because I had the strength and the will to do it.

Assemblymember Greg Aghazarian
District 26



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Werner & Margot Meyer

Interviewed by Macalan Lindner

Werner and Margot Meyer

By Macalan Lindner

We Share a Nightmare – We Share a Dream

“You’d get a bullet in the head if they knew you were a Jew.” This is how Werner Meyer remembers his native country, Germany. His wife, Margot, now close to 90 years old, sits beside him at the table and nods her head in agreement. Though they did not know each other in Germany, they share a common past. Husband and wife, Margot and Werner Meyer, both survived humanity’s darkest and most shameful hour, the Holocaust.

Both Werner and Margot clearly remember Kristallnacht – the night of broken glass – as a turning point in their lives. Werner’s mother knew a woman whose husband was a high-ranking Nazi official. She told Werner’s mother exactly what time the troops would come to their neighborhood and how long they would stay that night. Werner and his family were able to escape harm on Kristallnacht by spending the night driving in his family’s car. After the troops left, his family returned to their home and hid in the attic until morning. Margot and her family also spent Kristallnacht hiding in the attic of their home. As they hid in silence, they could hear the Nazi troops destroying their home below. On Kristallnacht, synagogues were burned, including the one in which Werner celebrated his Bar Mitzvah, shop windows were broken, and homes were vandalized. Though Werner’s family and Margot’s family had been spared physical harm, it was this night that they remember as the moment they realized their lives were in danger.

Werner and his brother left Germany within months of Kristallnacht. They fled to England where they lived with a family friend in Oxford. Having a sponsor in England had allowed them to acquire a “temporary” work visa. Margot and her siblings came to England as part of the Kindertransport. The Kindertransport was a movement started by English Jews to rescue Jewish children from Germany, Poland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Though Hitler would not allow adults to leave Nazi territory, he did allow some children passage to England – for a price. For all intent and purposes, the children of the Kindertransport were purchased from Hitler.

For both Margot and Werner, leaving their parents was the most difficult thing they had ever done. They both knew in their hearts that they would never see their parents again and yet, they knew that if they were to survive, they had no choice but to leave Germany and their families behind.

Werner and Margot met in Oxford. After their marriage, an opportunity to move to Canada presented itself. As the war progressed, security in North America became a major issue and German nationals – even Jews – were treated with suspicion. Werner was placed in an internment camp. He was assigned to a farm as a laborer. Though he

was not paid for the work he did, at least he was able to enjoy, at last, a small sense of freedom. Margot worked as a maid – pretty much the only job a woman was allowed to have in those days.

Werner's brother had settled in Stockton, California and as soon as they could, Margot and Werner joined him there.

After the war, Margot and Werner's worst fears were realized as they learned that the families they left behind in Germany had all been killed in concentration camps. In Jewish tradition, a candle is lit and special prayers are said on the anniversary of a loved one's death. It is also customary to visit the grave and place a small rock on the headstone as a symbol of God's eternal presence in this world and the next. Margot and Werner do not know the date their parents perished nor is there a grave to visit. Yet they keep the traditions as best they can, honoring their parents on Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Commemoration Day, each year.

After everything they had experienced, Margot and Werner wanted to make a clean break. They wanted to build a future that did not reflect the horrors of their past. They decided not to speak German in their home and that they would never return to Germany. Yet, when their son became an adult and interested in his family roots, they changed their minds and went to Germany with him. They spent two weeks in Germany gathering as much information as they could about their family. The history is currently a two-volume set that records their family history, life experiences, and what they know about their deaths. They also retrieved 8mm films that Werner had taken as a young adult both before and during the rise of the Nazi Regime. With the help of their son, these films have now been transferred to DVDs, making them available to the next generation of their family.

To this day, Margot and Werner are proud Jews. Throughout their lives they have never given up their Judaism. With Hitler coming to power, betrayal by friends, and their lives in danger, they still carried their Jewish identity with them. Werner remembers showing up at his barber's, the same barber he had been going to his whole life, to find a sign on the door that said, "No Jews allowed." With the whole country turning against the Jewish people, it would have been easy to leave Judaism behind and embrace another faith, but Margot and Werner did not do that.

Margot and Werner Meyer are still living as proud Jews in Stockton, California. It is my hope that they will continue to share the thousands of pages of documents that they have collected, the DVDs, and their stories with my generation and those that come after me, and that their story will inspire others to learn from the nightmares of our past and to work towards the dream of a future without hate or prejudice.

*Assemblymember Karen Bass
District 47*



*Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors*

Yakob & Dvora Basner

*Interviewed by Tiffany Obembe & Sally
Cho*

*Michele Cohen-Rodriguez-
Rodri*

Interviewed by Franklin Lee

Lilke Majzner

Interviewed by Chelsea McNay

Acknowledgements

*Eric Gordon, Director
The Workmen's Circle
Southern California District*

Yakob and Dvora Basner

By Tiffany Obembe and Sally Cho

A Tale of Two Survivals

Yakob and Dvora Basner's lives took shape in the quaint town of Riga, the Latvian Capital of 400,000 residents of where they spent their entire childhood. Yakob came from a modest middle class family who valued their Jewish heritage. His father was a letter designer and his mother was a traditional housewife. He remembers his father as being a hard worker and a contributing member to society. He was not an only child as he shared his childhood with twin brothers. In Latvia, the Jewish community was about 50,000 in size and was a very apparent aspect in the Latvian society. Members of the Jewish faith were very active in the community as organizations, clubs, hospitals, nurseries, and schools were all constructed by Jewish Latvian residents. Many beautiful synagogues were erected across the town and Yakob remembers fondly of his visits to his personal synagogue and spending time with his family and friends while worshipping. His family was very orthodox, but by far he recalls his mother as being the pious one in the family and always insisting that the family go to synagogue.

Dvora Basner also came from a similar background as her then friend, and neighbor Yakob. Her parents had four children including herself and represented a modest middle class family. Her father worked while her mother took care of her and her sister and two brothers. Dvora's family lived next to Yakob on a flat of which they shared. She enjoyed going to synagogue with her family and attending school.

Holidays were times both Yakob and Dvora enjoyed the most during their childhoods. Because the nature of their families revolved around traditional Orthodox Judaism, holidays were an important part of their lives and were very memorable. Passover was one of Yakob's favorite holidays as he remembers eating a lot of matza. His mother cooked special meals and there were always delicious drinks to go with their delicious holiday foods. Dvora's favorite holiday was Hanukah because not only were there delicious foods such as latkes, but there was also a gift giving process which she remembers as being a fun aspect of growing up. Both Yakob and Dvora remember their non-Jewish neighbors as quite friendly and accepting. But during the years leading up to the war, it was apparent that tensions were rising, as even then a five year old Yakob remembers when he went to the hospital for an injury. His nurse spoke Latvian to him and rudely told him to, "go back to Palestine". Young Yakob did not know what she meant as he only spoke Yiddish but he soon found out what she had said to him.

Although many of their neighbors had been friendly, as war grew near, Dvora noticed that the state police was increasingly becoming anti-Jewish. And until 1934, the Latvian government was a democratic republic which had Jewish representatives, but it was not the case by late 1934. The government was liquidated and it had seemed that a dictatorship was on the rise. Jewish individuals were no longer allowed to have jobs and

therefore both Yakob's and Dvora's fathers had lost the right to hold a job. They had lived in a building with German immigrants their entire childhood but now many of their German neighbors moved back to Germany. Only Jews remained in the town which meant that there was now no non-Jewish individual to protest the inhuman crimes that would soon follow. Humiliation was a major factor in the treatment of Jews as they were forced to wear the Star of David on their arms as if to be forced to be ashamed of their Jewish heritage. If someone was caught in the street without the star they would be shot and killed on the spot. Yakob and Dvora were no longer allowed to attend school because it had been closed along with many other Jewish established facilities. It had been as if their whole lives were being taken away from them.

As the Jewish community began to crumble in Riga, all of the Jewish inhabitants were forced to live in ghettos. People were only allowed to take a few necessary items. Yakob remembers hiding his bike and skis which he had just gotten for his birthday, in his home so that the Germans wouldn't find them. His father was separated from his family so he felt responsible to decide what his family should take to the ghetto. Dvora merely took a few books and items of clothing along with her and left the rest behind because her parents had fled away from Riga and she was then living with her aunt.

During the short time that the ghettos were used, 2 days, Yakob recalls that 27,500 Jews were brutally killed for one reason or another along with his mother and brother. They had been taken into the nearby forest away from the ghetto and promised to be resettled elsewhere. This was not the truth however, and the Germans shot and killed Jews at will but they couldn't kill them all. The remaining individuals sat in the freezing snow waiting their fate but they were allowed to return to the ghetto. While in the ghetto Yakob met his uncle who informs him that a small ghetto for workers was being organized. Yakob lied about his age saying he's 18 when he was barely 13 years old and at this point is unaware of what happened to his family in the forest until someone told him. They had been killed on his birthday and until this day he experiences both sorrow and celebration on his birthday.

Every morning in the ghetto they were taken on long walks to do hard labor. Yakob had to clean rooms for the German officers who were at the time residing in his former school. Any left over food or scraps such as horse meat, rotten fish, or spoiled canned goods were given to the Jews to eat. In the evening he would return back to his ghetto and in the morning the process would repeat itself.

Dvora's ghetto experience was much different than Yakob's because they resided in separate ones. As she had stayed behind due to the fact that she had her appendix removed. Therefore she remained in Riga for two years in the ghetto. She later became separated from her aunt and was forced to go into hiding at a woman named Maria's home. There, she hid in a potato cellar and was asked never to leave the cellar boundaries. For a year she remained in the potato cellar, with barely enough room to move around, she knew that her life depended on her staying inside.

Part II – The Concentration Camps

The ghetto life continued only until the completion of the Kaiserwald concentration camp in Riga. During summer and autumn of 1943, Yakob and the remaining prisoners were transported by ship to a Polish port. After a relatively short stay at the Polish Stutthof camp, the prisoners were transported once again because of the steady approach of American forces. Yakob recalls the officers herding and packing the prisoners into small train compartments as if they were cattle. In those cramped trains the Jewish prisoners were taken to the well-known Buchenwald camp in Germany, then later to Leytmeritz and Theresienstadt.

Yakob was constantly on the move toward a new concentration camp; yet, the living conditions were equally horrid. All the prisoners awoke with the first glimpse of sunlight, quickly marching outside and filing into neat rows for roll call. Officers called out each prisoner's identification number, and if someone was missing, the officers would search the entire camp while the rest of the prisoners waited in their rows. These roll calls could last for hours. Yakob remembers a time when an evening roll call lasted throughout the night, and many people gave up trying to withstand the fatigue and coldness. "It was a snowy night, and all around me, I could see people dropping to the ground. Some fell asleep and died; others were shot to death immediately," he says.

After roll call, he spent the rest of his day toiling under the supervision of 2 German bosses. Many of these "bosses" had actually been German criminals and thieves who were hired to treat the imprisoned Jews as brutally as possible. They took pleasure in beating the workers, also commonly using whips with an iron piece on the tip. In one instance, Yakob had been innocently working on his duty when one of the bosses ordered him to walk closer. Then, the officer started to whip Yakob, telling the other workers to watch closely and learn what kind of punishment would follow misconduct. The whip continuously struck his flesh and dug deeper scars, however, Yakob promised himself never to show a sign of weakness. "I knew what the boss wanted. He wanted to see me cry and beg on the floor for mercy." More determined than ever, Yakob bit his lips trying not to shed a single tear. The officer was equally determined to break Yakob's defiant pride, and ordered him, "Count!" Yakob had no other choice but to force out his pain and anger by yelling out the numbers. "...ACHT, NEUN, ZEHN..." The furious German continued to whip, making Yakob wonder how many more he could endure. "I thought he would give me 15 lashes, but soon I counted to 20, then to 25." He was finally let go, but it took a while before his brutally beat legs could not support the weight of his body. During another whipping, a German officer named Iron Gustav saw Yakob's body involuntarily jerk up after every lashing. Annoyed and eager to incur more damage, Iron Gustav held out his pistol directly on top of Yakob's head. As a result, Yakob's head hit into the pistol tip with every lashing, becoming full of bumps and bruises by the next day.

Such a day was followed by the shortest dinner before all the workers retired in their 3-level bunk beds that were infested with lice and other undetectable diseases. Sanitation was one of the last priorities in these concentration camps, in addition to safety. Yakob remembers that at one of the earlier camps, men slept on the cold, stone

floor, even in the harshest of winter days. “Sometimes they gave us some cloth-like materials for warmth...but you can’t call those blankets.” Thus, the workers were in constant danger of sicknesses. In fact, Yakob was ill with the typhoid fever when he was finally liberated by the Russians in 1944.

Yakob returned home to Riga after recuperating, only to find that all of his family members had been killed in the war. Merely 17 years old and alone in the world, Yakob believed that there were only 2 choices available. “I could stay on the streets and do nothing, or I could become something and live to tell my story. After suffering so much, I had to remain strong and show the Germans what I was capable of,” he says. With this goal, he sought out to find some family friends who kindly took him in and provided a home. For the next few year, Yakob diligently attended the Latvian high school, evening schools, and technical schools to learn a trade.

Meanwhile, his childhood friend Dvora was also living in Riga after surviving the war. She was walking down the street one day when she saw a troop of Russian soldiers marching towards her. As the men passed by, Dvora spotted her long-lost friend also marching in the crowd, and instantly yelled, “YAKOB!” Yakob marched on, but it didn’t take him long to find Dvora less than 2 days later. And then, these two fated friends were wed on June 8, 1948.

Almost 60 years later, Yakob and Dvora Basner seat themselves in front of two young high school reporters, eager to spill their painful memories of the Holocaust. They have long since been living comfortably as United States citizens with 2 daughters, 3 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren. Yet, they both feel an obligation to educate the young generations about a horrible event that “is dangerous and could be repeated” says Yakob. He does his best to tell his story by teaching at schools, attending seminars, participating in interviews, and even writing short memoirs. He hopes that these efforts will reach out to a modern population that is gradually forgetting the huge impact of the Holocaust. “It may not affect them directly, but people don’t have to be indifferent.”

Michele Cohen-Rodriguez-Rodri

By Franklin Lee

Under the Burning Candlestick

Beneath the burning thread from the candle there is darkness. While some were being burned, out of their lives some were underneath shivering in the darkness, deprived from their home, family, and freedom. Michele, knows that she is one of the lucky survivors from the Holocaust. However, her past experiences are unforgettable and has stained her childhood with so much misery that she envies adults with happy memories. Being only five, she lived the life of true starvation. Her life was not from the concentration camp where so many people spirits were burned and destroyed. Rather her story is the shade right underneath the candle where she had to hide from warmth; shunned away from life itself.

Michele was born in 1935 in Pairs, France. Her father, Max Rambert, came to Paris at 18 from Poland and married Chana. They bore four children. They had three sons: Akel, David, and Maurice; and one daughter, Michele, who was the youngest child of all four. They were the only Jewish family in their neighborhood. And although they celebrated all of their holidays they felt no problem living with many other French citizens who were mostly Roman Catholic.

When Michele became five-years old, around 1940, World War II was affecting many parts of Europe. From Michele's memories she remembers how the German trucks filled in boulevards and avenues. They first confiscated beautiful houses to use them as headquarters and offices. Then they made all Jewish people wear black shirts with the Star of David to symbolize that they were Jewish. Random people were taken from the streets and sent to triage camps where people were isolated by their gender, age, and health to be killed or sent to concentration camps. On some occasions Germans humiliated many people Jewish or not. For example, they would make men take off their pants to see if their penis were circumcised in order to determine if the men were Jewish or not (the Jewish religion circumcises boys on the 8th day after birth).

Through humiliating and violent methods Germans took many Jewish men and women to concentration camps. Maurice, Michele's brother, was one of the unlucky people to be caught and killed.

Her father, who had a business that was related to companies with thread, found the threat from the Germans very intimidating after Maurice's death and found a private home for Michele. He also hid his sons in the French underground. He used huge sums of money to keep all of his children hidden during the war time while he and his wife stayed in their home. They were forced to shop at certain times of the day and stay inside the house the remainder of the time.

Michele's life in the private home was very hard for her. Being only five, she needed the care of nurturing parents. Instead, she had to face hunger, mistreatment, and humility. Her private home was in a village in a very remote place where it was hard for many soldiers to venture. She stayed there with one woman who was receiving money from Michele's father. She gave Michele plenty of chores to do and took her along to the factory to work with her. Because Michele was not her child, and someone who was not to her liking, she scolded her often. Despite the hardship she continued to live in this remote area. Once, she had to hide in the forest alone because the German soldiers were nearby the village. If caught both Michele and the woman who was taking care of her would be killed. Therefore Michele had no choice but to hide in the forest for three days. There she fed herself with unripe berries which made her sick for many days.

After three long years, the war finally ended. "I remember that day very clearly. A radio station announced... 'Mr. Hitler you lost the war at last. The war is finally over.'" Right after hearing those words Michele burst into tears. Later that day her parents came with her brothers after the long miserable war.

When she came back, she greeted the American soldiers that were coming in big trucks on the street. They were throwing out many types of candies and treats. There Michele was able to retrieve gum called Juicy Fruit which is a brand that still exists.

Later Michele found out that only one of her father's five brothers came back home and only one sister of her mother survived the war.

When she grew up and came to America she met her husband Chen. Together they learned about their unforgettable pasts.

Her husband's father was related to the diamond industry. All Jewish men who were related to the diamond industry had to suffer immensely because their children were taken by force and put to concentration camps. Chen, being the oldest, took the responsibility of the other children. From the many days in the concentration camps they were forced to do many things. Often, in thin clothing they forced the kids outside in the cold about three feet apart from each other. From those horrible situations Chen survived. It is no wonder, that when he came out of the camp at age 11 he was only 30lbs.

Despite Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews, they were able to thrive. Michele believes that their strong personality and bond between their families contributed to this. She now has one son, grandson, and a loving daughter-in-law.

Lilke Majzner

By Chelsea McNay

Lilke's Story

“It was a wonderful generation of young people...a generation of dreamers, and those dreamers developed an inner force to reach out to the stars.”

When our interview started, Lilke's eyes sparkled, reminiscing of the old days, of theaters and concerts, culture and intellect in her hometown of Lodz, Poland. Lilke was born on October 30th, 1921, into a Jewish middle class family with Socialist ideals.

She had one brother, Elek, 3 years younger than her. He had chocolate brown hair and bright blue eyes, and was an exceptionally good mathematician. They understood each other very well, and were extremely close. “I know he was punished once by my parents with words, no physical thing, and he was crying, and I started to cry, because he was crying. Everything was vice versa,” she said. “He was a dear, dear friend.”

Her parents were very understanding and open with her and Elek. Her father was an assemblyman, and her mother was a teacher. They grew up in Lodz as well, and were educated in Russian schools. Education was very important to their family. Lilke and her brother both attended private Jewish schools, and Lilke had just graduated high school.

“Wherever you live, you build your life,” was the slogan of the Jewish community in Poland. Jewish life was very active in Lodz, with many Jewish schools, sports, orchestras, theaters, and temples. Everyone was involved, from the youngest children to the oldest members of society, to reach out to create a better life for themselves. Lilke's family was not very observant, as they celebrated the Jewish holidays more symbolically than religiously. They celebrated holidays that stemmed from the Socialist Movement, such as International Women's Day, and International Child's Day. However, there was still an amount of anti-Semitism in Lodz. “It is very hard to describe,” Lilke said. “You could feel that you were not liked.” Occasionally, when walking to school, Polish children would throw rocks at them. Jews were also not allowed to have a profession in certain industries, such as the tobacco industry.

In 1937 in a small township, or shtetl, in Poland, there was a pogrom. Polish people came to Jews' houses and cracked the windows, and attacked the Jewish people. Lilke and her family protested against it, in demonstrations in Lodz and other cities in Poland. “I will not blame everybody, I will blame the Polish church, which did not do anything to hold back, but was the point of hatred, implanting the hatred. Those memories are not pleasant memories.”

Lilke was very aware of the slogans of Hitler and the Nazis because *Mein Kampf* was published, but could not imagine that it would develop in such a colossal impact on the world. “We could not imagine that all Germans would fall under the spell...of Hitler,” she said. They believed the democratic parties were quite strong, and thought that they would be highly opposed to Hitler’s ideas.

At the end of 1937, they started to hear that German Jews with Polish ancestors were deported from Germany to a border city in Poland. In the beginning of 1938, a group of German Jews were sent to Lodz. The German government had told their population that the life in Germany was going from a culture that was on a high intellectual level, into one on a level of complete inhumanity.

“Human nature is very particular, you know. Sometimes we don’t want to listen to bad news, so we build a wall. So when those people start to tell us what was happening in Germany, we believed it, but we could not comprehend that it would come to this. German Jews were extremely assimilated into the culture. They believed they were first German, then Jews. They were wondering: why is this happening to us? So we were aware, and we felt in 1938 that something was going to happen.”

Their life did not change at first. Lilke lost her mother from cancer of the esophagus in 1938. She attended an exam to enter the University of Warsaw School of Nursing, and her brother was still working, and at school. In June of 1939, they went on vacation to Czechoslovakia for two weeks, and returned to Poland, stopping in Warsaw on their way to Lodz.

However, it was a very difficult time, because her family felt as though something was hanging over their heads. They had friends whose children were sent to the military, because of the military mobilization in Poland, and they did not know what would await them.

It was September the first, 1939, when everything changed. It was a wonderful, sunny morning, one of the last days of summer, and she and her family heard planes passing overhead. Her father did not go to work that day, sirens could be heard, and the radio was monitoring the planes. Lilke and her brother looked at all the planes passing by, and wondered if they were Polish or German. “We went to bed very late, and did not know what the morning would bring. The next morning, the newspaper was not there. We turned on the radio, and it announced that Poland was occupied by Germany.”

In the next weeks, her father lost his job in the city hall, and small stores and schools were closed. Lilke often saw German soldiers on motorcycles in the streets. However, when her father lost his work, her family also lost their livelihood. A few days after the occupation, her father’s good friend from his work, brought them packages of food.

Two weeks after the Germans occupied Lodz, in the evening the building in which they lived was surrounded by German soldiers. They knocked on the doors. In

Lilke's hallway, were large bookcases, and on the second and third shelves were books by a famous German writer. The soldier marched into the hallway, took out a knife, and began to throw the books off of the shelves. He told them to get ready to leave their apartment. "The minute the Germans were in the city, people instinctively felt that something was going to happen, so everyone had a backpack with clothes in it, to take with them. We were not allowed to bring these backpacks. We were only wearing robes and slippers." Big trucks were outside, and everyone was put onto different trucks. They arrested Lilke and her family, and they were sent to a factory in Lodz, where they stayed for six weeks.

"I cannot describe the feeling exactly, but we could not understand what was happening. It was probably fright. We were frightened. In a sense we were in the unknown, and this was the tactic of the Germans, to make us disoriented. They said to 'sit over there,' with 500-600 people, and we did not know what would happen. We only heard commands: Come here! Sit down! Stand up! Go to this room! Do not go into this room!"

After the six weeks, Lilke and her family were put on a train, without knowing where they were being sent. It was November, and it was snowing. The train stopped at a shtetl, and let a small party out, which she, her brother, and her father were a part of. A group of Jews stood at the station, and said a few good words to cheer them up. They then took them to a small temple, gave them something to eat, and divided them to different families that lived there. Lilke was taken in by an older man and his wife. "He had a wonderful angelic face...he looked like a prophet," she mentioned. They stayed in their warm, clean house for two weeks.

Then, she, her father, and her brother had to decide what to do, and where to go. They decided to go to another small city, Piotrkow, in which her father had an uncle. They left in the middle of the night with a slate and one horse. She lived in a crowded apartment with her relatives, and her father found work at the Jewish Community Center, in the Department of Social Work and Welfare. Her family received a room in the school building, and donated bedding.

Everyday, German soldiers showed great brutality towards the Jews in Piotrkow. They could not walk on the same sidewalk as Germans, and they had to bend down whenever they saw them. Young people started to organize illegal schools, and Lilke's brother was a teacher for younger children. After her father passed away in 1941, she and her brother joined an underground, or illegal, group of young people that tried to convey news and illegal literature they received from Warsaw, to other groups of that kind in other areas. They would meet every evening to talk, sing songs, and recite poetry. They started to build an 'underground' life, by doing anything they could to oppose to German soldiers, and to keep up the human spirit. During this time, Lilke also met her future husband.

However, in 1942, she and her brother were captured by German soldiers, and put onto another train, and sent to a working camp called Blizin. They were divided to go

into barracks, with straw spread on the floor. Each morning, the soldiers would count all of the people in “appeals.” “If someone was missing, or if someone was sick, the whole camp would be punished. They would not receive their ration of bread, or soup. During the day, her brother was forced to sew German clothing, while she worked in a small hospital on the grounds, where they tried to help anyone who was sick, even without the proper supplies. Blizin, like any other working camp during the Holocaust, had horrible conditions. They used the snow to wash, and were victims of terrible physical abuse. “I don’t know how we survived it. Our will to live, probably.”

It was during this time Lilke met three older girls, who she became very good friends with. They developed a sisterhood, called the ‘Camp Sisters,’ who were like family to her after their time at Blizin, and for a very long time after the Holocaust ended.

Lilke and her brother had two encounters with messages from their underground group during their time at Blizin. Once, they heard stones hitting the roof of where they slept, that meant that people had surrounded the camp. The second time, someone working outside the camp brought a note to them on cigarette paper. Symbolic words were written on the paper, meaning that someone would bring money from time to time to divide between the underground group members.

Lilke and her brother were put on trains and sent to six camps over the following years, until she arrived at Auschwitz. “That was a different planet. That is something you cannot describe. The Camp Sisters helped me survive...to live through each day.” Once, she was waiting in a line to use the showers. In front of them was a line of gypsies. They went into the tunnel to go into the showers, and Lilke and others were next in line. They started to notice that no one was coming out. The gypsies had been killed, and they were afraid to go into the tunnel, and not come out the other end. However, they did go in, and they were stripped naked. Above their heads, light bulbs were swinging, and droplets of water were trickling down from the showerheads. The water stopped, and the German soldiers sent them out. “We came out alive from the showers. We did not know whether to be thankful to be alive or not. At this time we were already skeletons, dirty, and hungry. After the showers, I went to a place where I could see men walking around. I called the name of my brother, and he was standing by the wires that were dividing the men and womens’ camps. I kissed him goodbye, and that was the last goodbye.”

From Auschwitz, she was sent to another camp in the mountains, and then on a long march to Bergen Belson, another death camp. They were forced to march for two or three weeks without food or shoes, and when someone fell, German soldiers shot them. “The people behind you were always trying to help you stand up, and keep going. Near the end, we could hear canons. Some places had already been liberated by the Americans and the Russians.”

In 1945, Bergen Belson was liberated by the English Army. She met her future husband again at the liberation, and together, they began to gather leftover papers and belongings of people who had lived in the camps. They organized a communal life right away. It was very difficult, but they organized culture facilities, to help the surviving

people to connect to the world again. Lilke received a letter from their socialist friends, saying that they were invited to go to Brussels, Belgium. Four months after the liberation, they traveled from Germany to Belgium, where they lived for five years. They received papers to come and live with family members in the United States, and they built their new life. She was married to her husband, and even while he has passed away, he was her life-long partner for 42 years.

“Have you found peace with the Holocaust?” I asked.

“You never can find peace with the Holocaust, but you can do something with the hate. You turn the hate into something positive. You think that you believe, that from your negative experiences, you can teach the younger generation to understand that our life is too short to hate each other. That we can do with our life so many positive things, that hatred brings hatred. The differences between people or nations can be solved much easier with words than with brutality. So you never find peace in the sense that you can forget it. You don’t want to forget, you want only to use it, in a positive way. What I would like to add, really, is one thing: to throw away the word hate from our human vocabulary and to let the younger generations know that life has so much to offer, to use what life is offering, and bring understanding of each other to more use.”

*Assemblymember Jim Beall, Jr.,
District 24*



*Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors*

Boris Mazelis

*Interviewed by Lien Nguyen
Translation provided by Kira Sukhenko*

Boris Mazelis

*Written by Lien Nguyen
Interview translated by Kira Sukhenko*

No history textbook could ever convey the experience that I had with this project; it was simply beyond words.

Boris Mazelis was born into an ordinary Jewish family on June 1, 1931 in Vinitza, a small city located in the southwest region of Ukraine. While growing up, his family was extremely close and celebrated the Jewish holidays together. Their loving home included his parents, sister, grandmothers, two aunts, and a nephew. His father was an expert craftsman and worked as an incredibly skilled shoemaker. Little did they know, this talent would eventually save their lives.

On June 22, 1941, the Mazelis family learned that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union. They knew it would not be long before the Germans targeted their own community in Litin, the city where Boris and his family had moved to from Vinitza. Within a month, the Germans entered the city, before the Mazelis family could evacuate. As a 10 year old boy, Boris remembers this experience very well.

On December 19, 1941, the Germans drove the Jews from their homes and forced them to march to the outskirts of Litin. Each family was ordered to pack three days worth of necessities; they were told that they were being relocated to another part of the city. In reality, the four thousand Jews were forced to march four miles toward a forsaken future. Filled with fear, they were completely vulnerable as they walked. Although Boris felt terrified, he tried to be strong for his sister.

Once they reached the outskirts of Litin, the Nazis selected the most skilled individuals and their immediate families, equaling about 300 individuals. Thankfully, Boris's father was known for his expertise as a craftsman, and so, their family was included in this fortunate group. However, Boris's grandmothers, aunts, and nephew were rejected and forced to the other side. Boris remembers his grandmother begging for her life, screaming for her family, and being dragged away.

Boris saw others forced to strip away not only their clothes, but the last shreds of their dignity. They were then ordered to march another two miles naked. The Nazis shot every last man, woman, and child that walked those two miles that day. In the Germans' eyes, these people were simply worthless. Heartbreaking cries and the sound of gunshots pierced through the night, keeping Boris awake as the killings continued. Boris lost all of his extended family in this massacre.

Shortly after the massacre, the surviving Jews were forced to live on a single street in Litin. This marked the beginning of the Jewish ghetto. Although Boris's father had permission to leave the ghetto in order to go to work, most Jews did not enjoy such a

small luxury. They had to shop, eat, and live on this single street. It was impossible to even think about leaving the ghetto due to the heavy security surrounding its perimeter. Without hesitation, the guards would shoot anyone who tried to escape.

The conditions in the Litin ghetto were simply inhumane. Life turned upside down and completely changed at this point. It became increasingly difficult to engage in traditional religious and cultural practices. Holidays could no longer be celebrated in the same open and festive manner, and speaking their native language, Yiddish, was discouraged. Everyone was required to wear the Star of David on their clothing and display it on their front door. As a child, Boris felt that wearing it made him special and unique. However, as people started to point their fingers at him as he walked down the street, it was not long before he understood the real meaning behind it. His family even bartered away their own belongings in order to make ends meet.

On June 12, 1942, the Germans and the Ukrainian police conspired to surround the Litin ghetto, arrest all the children, and murder them. Boris and his family were well aware of their cruel intentions. They desperately tried to find possible hiding places for the children. Boris and his sister had a secret plan, which ultimately saved their lives. Their hiding place was in the dirt cellar; a dirt hole underneath a makeshift toilet. As they rushed to hide underground, they accidentally tipped over the bucket. Still, the Mazelis family managed to hide in the cellar, surrounded by their own waste, for half the day. When the authorities and their dogs came to search for children in the house, they were too discouraged to check the bathroom thoroughly due to the repugnant stench.

Through word of mouth, Boris's family found out that the Germans were not killing Jews in Romania. In the summer of 1943, they were rescued by trustworthy Ukrainian friends Mikhail and Jevgena Bondarchuk. The Bondarchuks helped transfer Boris and his family across the border to a safer part of Ukraine, Zhemrinka, which was under Romanian control. Although Zhemrinka was located only an hour away from Litin, it took Boris and his family a full day to reach the city. Putting their own lives in danger, the Bondarchuks demonstrated immense courage and humanity in their efforts to save Boris and his family from harm.

Once they arrived in Zhemrinka, the Mazelis children remained in constant hiding. At this time, the Nazi soldiers were raiding Ukrainian houses to collect provisions for the troops. The Bondarchuks hid the Mazelis children in these sacks in the backyard just in case soldiers were to show up at their house. If they had been found by the authorities, the Bondarchuks were to pretend that they did not know where the children came from. Fortunately, Boris and his sister were never found.

While living in Zhemrinka, there was another occasion when the Mazelis family was miraculously saved. One night, a drunken Nazi soldier roaming the street suddenly barged into the Mazelis home. As he held a pistol to their mother's neck, Boris became frightened and did not understand what the soldier wanted from his mother. At that moment, other Nazi soldiers from outside called the drunken soldier to return back to the

street. Just before leaving, he struck Boris's mother across the face, leaving her shaken but grateful for her life.

Boris was the main caregiver to his sister while they lived in each ghetto; he learned how to cook since his parents were often away at work. Potatoes, porridge, and bread were the staples of their meager diet. The trick was to try not focus on their hunger, as they had much bigger problems. The lack of proper heating also made it difficult for Boris and his family to stay warm.

That same summer, as Boris and his family were living in Zhemrinka, the Germans killed the remaining residents of the Litin ghetto. It was a terrifying and tragic time in the lives of the Mazelis family. On March 20, 1944, when the region was finally liberated by the Soviet Army, Boris and his family returned to their hometown of Vinitza. At last, their freedom was restored after 33 long months. Boris was just 13 years old.

Today in Litin, there stand four monuments that commemorate the catastrophic experience of the Jewish people at this time.

In April of 1992, Boris and his wife Sophia, along with their children and grandchildren, made the decision to move to the United States, as anti-Semitism remained widespread in the Soviet Union at this time. The economy in the former Soviet Union was quite bad, and the shelves of stores in Vinitza were growing barer by the day. It became increasingly difficult for people to acquire the most basic necessities for survival. Even waking before dawn to wait in store lines did not bring much luck. In 2003, Boris and his family came to live in California and have resided here ever since.

Boris feels that it is his duty to tell his story to the world. The memories of his experience during the Holocaust are still fresh in his mind. He learns that *"life should not be taken for granted."*

Next year, Boris and his wife will celebrate their 50th anniversary, their "golden year." Today, they have two daughters and three granddaughters who live close by. After all they have been through, their family remains committed to the traditions of their past and putting family above all else.

Assemblymember John Benoit
District 64



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Earl Greif

Interviewed by Rachel Minkoff

Earl Greif

By Rachel Minkoff

A Special Man with a Sincere Message

Earl Greif is a Holocaust survivor and a man to be respected as he survived one of the most dreadful happenings that mankind has ever seen, that the world has ever known, the Holocaust. History tends to repeat itself, in terms of anti-Semitic hatred, and Earl has dedicated his entire life to making sure that the Holocaust never happens again. No matter what, there will be hatred and Anti-Semitic people in this imperfect world. Earl's plan is to create a platform of education for the children of the next generation. It all starts with us, if we are encouraged to learn of the monstrosities of our society then the children of today will most likely grow up to fight against anti-Semitism. A poem that was written by Earl's wife Shirley Greif says just that:

“Starving, broken, smelling of death
The children of Israel
Survived the madman's dream
Carried the blood and the ancient faith
Back to the Promised Land ...” (Greif 158).

Earl is building a vessel that will last forever, a Tolerance Education Center. A museum that will open the eyes and ears of children and adults to the stories, recordings, movies, and newspaper articles of the many *human beings* lost during the Holocaust.

Earl's story is a miracle, an unbelievable experience for anyone to have lost their faith. But to Earl he never stopped believing in G-d — in that higher power. While barely surviving, Miriam Greif, Earl's mother, would constantly tell him to “have faith, ...the time will come when we will be free again” (Greif 60). While barely surviving in the freezing winter Earl would play back childhood memories in his mind. He recalled the memory of sitting at the Shabbat dinner table with his loving family. He could smell and taste the warm baked Chalah bread with butter and the flavor of fruits and cheeses. After a year, those memories began to fade and the nightmares of death began to set on his already tortured mind. The vivid memories of the cold nights in the forest and the horrid view of Jewish men with gold stars sewn to their clothing lifting dead Jewish carcasses onto wheelbarrows, and tossing them into mass graves. These lifeless bodies meant nothing to the Nazi's, only hell for the Jews.

Before being put into a starvation death camp, Earl's parents, Izak and Miriam, and his brother Lou, age ten, Dvorah, age two, and Earl, age sixteen, thought it would be best if they fled from their home in Chlopcezie, Poland. Their home was being attacked by “hoodlums.” Earl's family stayed at their Uncle's house, Hersch Schreiber, for a period of time in Rudki. They soon learned that the “hoodlums” were stealing all the riches of their friends and family. His family soon decided to flee into the deep forest to avoid the

Germans. After a year of living in the forest with no food or comforts from their long lost home, Earl's father one day saw a sign saying that if any Jewish person was caught hiding in the forest he would be shot instantly. The family was exhausted and thought it would be best to give up. The sign also stated that if you turned yourself in, then one would be given work. For those reasons, his family thought it was best to turn themselves into the Germans. They realized too late that this was the biggest mistake they would ever make. The family was not put to work; instead they were put into a starvation camp in Rudki. While walking towards the barracks they found themselves stepping on dead corpses lying on the cold dirt. The Germans took the Greif family to a room packed with people, no furniture, just a bunch of hay that was left on the floor for them to lie on. The only food to eat was called potato soup which was only a bowl of hot water and potato shavings. People were literally being starved to death, there was no way out. Earl said that many people would not even get up to go to relieve themselves because they felt so defeated. The stench was that of rotting flesh, which was unimaginable. The room was filled beyond capacity with people causing infections and dysentery diseases. Death came. Everyone in Earl's family got sick except for his mother; Miriam would put cold rags on her families fevered foreheads. The pressure on her was immense.

In April 1943, Earl heard gun shots being fired, and the Gestapo forced all the Jews out of the compacted room to a ditch outside. The Gestapo would shoot anyone who was moving slowly. That's when Earl heard the gunshots. Everyone was screaming and Earl, crying hysterically, said "We're going to die. This is the end." Earl's mother took Earl and kissed him on the head quickly and told him she loved him. That's the last thing he ever heard from his mother, Earl and his younger brother Lou crawled into a brick oven and hid there for a long time. Everyone else was taken outside to a large ditch and was shot to death. Earl's mother, thirty-eight, and father, forty-three and baby sister were among the many that died that day at the starvation camp. Lou and Earl hid in the brick oven for the rest of the day and came crawling out on their stomachs late that night. The starvation camp was completely destroyed; no remnants of it existed. After the mass killing, the camp was torn down. The two brothers were completely lost in the world with no surviving family, no life around them. All they had left in the world were each other. In April 1943, the two brothers fled back into the forest, back into hiding.

Lou, being only around eleven years old, cried every day in that forest. Weeping that they would die from this, he was constantly crying for fear of losing both of their lives to the Germans. One day Earl told Lou that he was going to take a walk alone in the forest, and when he got far enough away from his brother where he would not be seen or heard, Earl collapsed on the floor of the forest and began to weep. He wept hysterically, holding his hands out to the sky praying to G-d that he and his brother would survive this horrific period. Pleading to G-d for protection, for some kind of support, when Earl dropped his hands and he looked out at the forest and saw, small animals, chipmunks, squirrels, little birds looking at him. "Angels," Earl thought. "Angels are with us"! He said to himself. Earl had a complete turnaround and a whole new look at life with a different attitude. He became fearless, ready for what ever lay ahead. He sprinted back to his weeping brother and calculated a plan to head towards Russia. They changed their names to sound less Jewish and headed out to Russia where they ran into a man who

owned a farm. The man took the boys in after they told the farmer that their mother was very ill and their father had died. The farmer gave them work and a place to stay. Almost everyday Earl and some of the other boys he worked with would take the cows to a pool of water and go swimming. Earl was the only one of all the boys not to take off his pants. The boys made fun of him constantly and accused him of being circumcised. Only Jewish boys were circumcised at that time. The other boys went so far as to try to rip off his pants. Thankfully the farmer shooed the boys along. It was a very close call for Earl and his brother. The next day Earl and Lou packed their things and went back on the road. Side by side the two brothers walked along the highway which seemed like an eternity. When he saw a Russian truck headed towards the war, Earl explained to the Russian army men their story and asked for a ride to Russia. Unfortunately, since the truck was headed toward the Russian front they did not pick them up. They suggested waiting for another vehicle going toward Russia. About thirty minutes later a Russian tank arrived. Earl then jumped out in the road forcing the tank to halt. Mr. Greif explained to the men in uniform his situation and asked if they could hitch a ride back to their nearest camp sight. The Russian soldier said yes, but only had room for one of them. Being the smart man that Earl was, he decided to sit on top of the tank while his brother sat inside.

Soon the two wandering brothers would be free, protected by the Russian army. The war had ended in 1945, and it was time to find refuge. The two brothers came to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1947 where they located an uncle named Abraham Greif. Lou, who was twelve, began going to school and got straight A's. At the age of eighteen, Lou relocated to California, and accepted a job with Hughes Aircraft Company. While Earl was still trying to find himself he decided then that he would move to Los Angeles to find a job. He became a very successful real estate agent. During that time he met the love of his life, Shirley Greif.

Before all of this, when the Greif family went into hiding Earl had an older sister named Reizel that escaped Poland before 1939 when the Nazis came to attack all the Jews. Isn't it ironic that Lou, Earl and Reizel ended up in Los Angeles, and now keep in close contact? After having lost all of his family in the Holocaust (parents, aunts, uncles, cousins), it was a miracle to have their sister.

Earl could have given up in the forest with his brother, but instead he bravely ran and hid— it worked! He made something out of himself. One day in Los Angeles he was watching the news and saw skinheads denying that the Holocaust ever existed. When Earl heard these ridiculous, outrageous statements he decided from that day on that he would tell his story, that he would educate future generations. That's when he began reliving his past in order to tell his story; he was determined to educate the world so that the Holocaust would never come again.

Earl Greif has many accomplishments; he is co-founder of the Holocaust Memorial in Palm Desert, California, has shared his experience in a two hour video with Steven Spielberg and the Shoah Foundation, and has been written about in many newspaper articles. Earl speaks at many middle and high schools to inform and educate the students. Mr. Greif even wrote a book called "Angels in the Forest," which tells

about his fight for survival, and he confessed that every time he reads his book that he breaks down in tears because of the horrifying memories he survived. Mr. Greif's current project is building the Tolerance Education Center. He hopes to break ground sometime in 2008 and will be dedicated to all the people that perished during the Holocaust. Earl has created a non-profit foundation for people to donate to this museum.

During the interview Mr. Grief passionately said, "We Holocaust survivors will not last forever. I am 83, but this Tolerance Education Center will *be* forever." Talking with Earl and hearing his story was an inspirational experience. He is by far one of the most gentle and kind individuals I have ever met. Earl Greif is a special man with a sincere message.

Assemblymember Julia Brownley
District 41



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Jan Czucker

Interviewed by Allyson Zucker

Jan Zucker

By Allyson Zucker

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less
traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*

-- Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

My grandfather Jan Zucker was born a few years before Hitler's rise to power. He was the fifth of six children in a religious, learned, but relatively normal Jewish family in a non-descript Hungarian-Czechoslovakia border town called Berehovo. He lived on one of the main roads in town in a building which also housed his father's sister and her family. His father owned a winery with his brother-in-law on the outskirts of town, and although they had a small apartment, no running water, and an outhouse for a bathroom, my grandfather reminisces fondly of his time there. On a typical day, he would attend public school in the morning until noon, go home to eat supper, and then skip off to Cheder (Hebrew School) through the evening.

Before the Nazis actually came to Berehovo, his family followed what the Hitler regime was doing by reading the newspaper and listening to the radio quietly so that he and the other children wouldn't hear what was going on. "As a child I didn't really think on those bases [that anything would happen to his family]. Of course my family was scared, but we had no choice, nowhere to go."

The Nazis forced the Jews to wear a yellow star on their clothes and made it illegal for Jews to own certain businesses, which forced his father to sell their business to a loyal Gentile employee. In 1944, around Passover and Easter, the Germans moved all the Jews in town to a brick factory at the outskirts of the village, along with roughly 20,000 Jews from the surrounding villages, creating a Jewish ghetto. Each family had about a 12' by 12' space, divided only by sheets that were hung up.

From time to time, the Nazis would come and transport families elsewhere by train. My grandfather and his family were there for roughly two months and were shipped out on the last transport on May 28, 1944 to Auschwitz, Poland. At this point, he was only thirteen and had no idea what to expect. "I just went along with my parents."

Right before the transport, he remembers his father sneaking out to pray at the Jewish cemetery to pay respect at the grave of his father's parents and his father's brother, Shlomo. Why would his father take such a risk? My grandfather later learned that when Shlomo was deathly sick in another city, his father traveled to bring him back to Berehovo to experience love and a sense of dignity in his remaining months, and to be buried next to his parents in his hometown. Before Shlomo died, he said to my grandfather's father, "You should call upon my soul should you ever need me, and if I

have any merit deserving from this world, I will intervene.” These words were not fully understood to a thirteen year old boy at the time.

The train ride to Auschwitz had people squeezed into each box car. My grandfather specifically remembers that there was no bathroom and the pungent smells more than he does the duration of the trip. When they arrived at Auschwitz three to five days later, it was raining and my grandfather was holding onto his father’s hand. His cousin Moshe pulled him away from his father. Understanding what was to come, his father gave him his coat and assured him, “I’ll see you later.” Another individual with their family did the same for my grandfather’s little sister, Rivka (for whom I am named), and pulled her away from her mother, but Rivka ran back to the other line to be with her mother.

Each and every day thereafter for many months, my grandfather would ask Moshe when his parents would come to see him. His cousin Moshe promised, “tomorrow, tomorrow...” in an attempt to encourage his hopes. They never showed up and likely were taken to the crematorium straight away.

While standing on a brick in the back row (in order to look bigger, older, and more capable) my grandfather was chosen along with Moshe to go to help build another camp called Lieberozah which was in Germany near Berlin. A few others he knew from Berehovo, including his childhood friend Hugo Green, Hugo’s father and cousin, Mr. Green and Joseph Katz (a.k.a. “Patchu”) were also chosen for the job. Since my grandfather’s town had changed hands so many times, he spoke many languages (Hungarian, Czech, Yiddish, Hebrew and German), even at the early age of thirteen. When the Germans realized this they began using him as an interpreter and “gofer.”

In the middle of winter, the Nazis marched him and roughly another 2,000 prisoners from Lieberozah to a different camp called Sachsenhausen. During this week-long death march, which only 700 people survived, my grandfather slept in the snow and was barely fed. My grandfather remembers the only reason he kept walking was that, “if you stopped, they would shoot you.”

Around March or April 1945, after having spent about a month in Sachsenhausen, my grandfather was moved to another camp called Mauthausen in Austria. The conditions worsened as there he witnessed German soldiers regularly escort Jews to a ditch that they made them use as a bathroom and shoot them. At this point, my grandfather just went on, day to day, thinking it would be only a day or two before it was his turn to die.

Much to his surprise, the Germans moved my grandfather again, along with Moshe, Hugo, Mr. Green and Patchu. This time to another camp called Gunzkirchen, which was in the middle of the forest in Austria. “Everyone was weak, just skin and bones” he says.

And then, unexpectedly, one morning he woke up and all the Germans guards had disappeared. They had run away, the Americans had arrived, and the prisoners were now free. My grandfather, Hugo, Patchu and Mr. Green wanted to go up to the main road and see the Americans, but Moshe wanted to stay and pray. They agreed that my grandfather would wait on the road for Moshe, but my grandfather never saw Moshe again and assumes he died that day. This was incredibly painful as my grandfather believed that Moshe had kept himself alive so he could protect him.

The American soldiers saw the emaciated prisoners and threw them whatever they had to eat, including their K-rations, chocolate, and Spam. My grandfather, having been nearly starved, couldn't digest this food and as a result got very sick. The Americans put him on a truck to a hospital in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. After regaining his strength, he began to make his way home to Berehovo despite not knowing what awaited him there. Without money, he would sit on the steps of a freight train and as it went by at every station, he would descend and beg for food. This became his routine for the next two weeks, until he got to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia where someone pointed him to a food/soup kitchen. When he arrived at the kitchen and he began contemplating what had happened, where was he to go next, and what more he may have to endure, the manager of the soup kitchen offered him more food if he agreed to stay to help sweep and clean.

At this point in my interview, my grandfather, for the first and only time, began to cry. He explained that out of nowhere, there in the street in front of this kitchen, were his two of his uncles including his beloved Uncle Frank. They walked by looking as if they owned the town. My grandfather yelled, "Uncle Frank, Uncle Frank, Uncle Frank!" Frank didn't recognize him and asked, "Who are you?" My grandfather replied, "Your nephew, Yosi Zucker, your sister Chana's son." Uncle Frank answered, "Yosi, Yosi Zucker! I expected everyone to come back but not you!"

After the reunion, Uncle Frank bought my father new clothes and gave him a train ticket back to Uncle Frank's and my grandfather's maternal grandparent's home town of Kosice, Czechoslovakia. Once in Kosice, he once again was hospitalized as he was unable to keep down food and was experiencing horrific nightmares.

One day, two of his three older sisters came back from Auschwitz. When they had learned that my grandfather was still alive and in the hospital, they quickly ran to see him. My grandfather was happy to see them but kept looking over their shoulders, expecting to see his mother and little sister as well. When they realized what he was doing, his sisters began to cry uncontrollably. My grandfather's sisters have actually told me this story before, and with great pride. They say that upon seeing his older sisters cry like this, my grandfather, now 14 years of age who had been hardened as Nazi death camp survivor said to them, "Don't cry. I'll take care of you." And he has taken care of us all ever since.

The three of them were together for about a month when their older brother returned and then another sister was found. Despite being overjoyed by reuniting, one of them inevitably complained, "What good did it do that my father prayed by Uncle

Shlomo's grave (when he was not saved)?"'. However, the simple answer was, "Who do you think he prayed for? His family. His children." My grandfather realizes, "Five of six of us came back. We were considered lucky."

After the war my grandfather was sent to a rehabilitation camp in Ireland. Later he attended school in London while residing with his cousins. In 1946, at age 15, he got a visa to go to America to study at "Torah VaDaat", a Jewish rabbinical seminary school in Brooklyn, New York.

My grandfather believes the reason he survived was because he was "street smart", lucky, and at the right place, at the right time. Perhaps this is his secret and a blueprint for survival through terrible times: to believe in yourself and accept that even the hardest times will pass.

Much like the tone in Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," my grandfather speaks with an absence of self pity or a need for answers. Although Robert Frost is an American and his poem written in English, its message is quintessential and universal.

Assemblymember Anna Caballero
District 28



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Otmar Silverstein

Interviewed by Ashley Nguyen

Otmar Silverstein

By Ashley Nguyen

Otmar Silverstein is a World War II veteran who was imprisoned in Dachau for six weeks. He was drafted into the army when he came to the United States and fought in World War II. He was so glad to leave his country. He lives today to tell his story.

He was born in Graz, Austria in 1921. He has a younger brother and an older sister. His date to leave Graz was seventeen years later on July 27, 1938, but there was a mix up, resulting in Otmar and his brother missing the boat. The next boat to leave was on August 13, 1938 so they stowed away. If you stayed anywhere overnight, then one would have to register.

He came to the United States with a visa in 1939 with the help of his father's sister. His father's sister was already living in the United States so she put together all of the documents that would allow them to come into the country. In the end, only Otmar and his brother got to come into the country. The Gestapo gave them thirty days to get out of Germany. His mother and sister went to England. His father, brother, and he were going to go to Italy, but they did not possess the one thousand pounds of gold necessary to enter the country. They hired a Nazi to carry a gold watch that his father had inherited from his father and a jacket with his mother's earrings sewn to the shoulder pads. When they arrived, they got back the jacket with the diamond earrings, but the Nazi could not find the gold watch.

He was stationed at Dachau in 1938 prior to the war. Hitler arrested all the Jews and took them to concentration camps. His brother was killed because he was only thirteen and the Nazis had no use for children. His sister and mother were kept in jail for ten days. After that, Otmar and his family were taken on trains, in use from World War I. They weren't allowed to talk on the train and they had to stare up at the ceiling. There were storm troopers on the train watching them; these troopers were young and old. While on the train, Otmar's father became ill and lost consciousness. One of the storm troopers stopped at a train station and called a doctor. Otmar's father was taken off the train to a hospital. Otmar's mother stayed with his father at the hospital while he went into surgery. After his parents left the hospital, they waited for him. Otmar was later released from Dachau, because he was under eighteen and could not be drafted due to German restrictions. The family lived by selling all their goods including their prized piano.

They escaped to a small village called Kiputz, Israel by boat. The family were considered illegal immigrants. There were many pioneers living there, many who trained to be farmers. In one of Otmar's suitcase was a jacket that he had made for himself. His father said that there was only one thing that he could teach him and that was to be a tailor. The jacket had a five dollar bill hidden in the jacket so nobody would try to take

his money. He also had a diamond earring belonging to his mother sewn to the shoulder pad in his father's jacket.

He came to New York on August 1939. He learned how to farm from the National Farm School, finished in 1943, and continued to work on the farm. He was then drafted into the army, which put him on the path to expedited citizenship. He received basic training in Georgia for six weeks and was trained on how to watch for the enemy and shoot a rifle. He worked in a hospital in Okinawa for two years instead of fighting in the war because he was fluent in Greek and Latin. His main duty was to type up vaccination orders, which included a soldier's name, rank, and sickness. He never made a mistake in his vaccination orders. The G.I. Bill gave him the opportunity to finish his education.

He started at Michigan State and went to Cornell University for his Ph.D. He also received a doctoral degree from Harvard University. Today, he is happily married to his wife Natasha - they were married on June 11, 1947. He also has two sons, Robert and David. He doesn't miss anything about his past life. He has also never been ashamed to be a Jew.

Assemblymember Mark DeSaulnier
District 11



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Susan Greenwald

Interviewed by Lily Lin

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Rita Greenwald Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator/Case Manager

Susan Greenwald

By Lily Lin

A current resident in a peaceful Bay Area town and a survivor of the Holocaust, Susan Greenwald, was born on March 18, 1925 in the town of Mumkacevo of what was then known as the Republic of Czechoslovakia and today's Ukraine. Throughout her story, Greenwald returns to this same town to a country whose identity shifts with the red tides of Hitler's wings.

During her youth, the Republic of Czechoslovakia had a "wonderful freedom-loving democracy" and vibrant economy. Meanwhile its neighbor, Germany was convulsed with political upheavals and economic chaos.

In 1933, Greenwald's father died from a heart attack. Susan was eight years old; her only sibling, a younger brother, was six. That same year, Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. Two years later her mother remarried. In 1938, in the series of appeasement acts, the Republic of Czechoslovakia was given to Hungary. Being close allies of Hitler, the Hungarians borrowed many of the Nazi ideologies and subjugated the Jewish population of the former Czechoslovakia to many of the same discrimination that befell the Jews within Germany.

Susan Greenwald experienced many of those discriminatory acts firsthand. Attending an all girls business academy (high school) at the time, Greenwald and her Jewish classmates were suddenly no longer allowed to sit with their other non-Jewish classmates. Teachers turned a blind eye to anti-Semitism. Old friends and neighbors she had known her entire life turned into strangers.

In June of 1943, Greenwald graduated from the business academy. She was eighteen years old and had nothing to do. Many Jews could not even get a job working for free. By preventing students from entering higher education and forcing Jewish business owners to sell to the non-Jewish, Jews were increasingly shut out of the mechanics of daily life. Meanwhile the tides of Hitler's army spread across Europe. In March 1944, the Sunday after her nineteenth birthday, Greenwald heard on the radio that overnight Germany had crossed the border and taken over Hungary. Two or three days later, Greenwald and many others were gathered up into a ghetto. Her mother, brother, and herself stayed in a one-family house holding at various times nine to eleven other families. A few weeks later they were rounded up in groups of seventy to eighty people per wagon to be carted off to Auschwitz.

The wagons were uncomfortable windowless boxes, originally intended for livestock and unsuitable for human comfort. A bucket in the middle substituted a bathroom. Upon their arrival in Auschwitz, Greenwald and her mother were separated from her brother. They never saw him again. They found out many years later that he survived the camp only to die of tuberculosis nine days after the war ended.

Greenwald and her mother survived Auschwitz and were taken to a work camp at Unterlöss in Northwestern Germany. Although living conditions were considerably better than those at Auschwitz, Susan and her mother were subjected to long hours of hard labor. They clung to rays of hope that were strengthened by the sound of planes flying overhead and the sight of what they hoped to be wings marked with the British Air Force's insignia. In April of 1945, many women from Greenwald's camp were moved to Bergen Belsen. In the same month, the English arrived to liberate the victims of the war's tragedies. Suffering from an infection of typhoid fever, Greenwald and her mother were one of the first taken to be treated at a hospital. After her recovery, Susan worked for some time as a translator for the English army. The following summer, Susan finally returned home with her mother. By this time, what had once been the Republic of Czechoslovakia, and then Hungary, were then considered to be a part of the Soviet Union.

Susan Greenwald married another survivor of the Holocaust from her hometown. Discovering in-laws living in the United States and in fear of what the Russians may do in their communistic zeal, Greenwald and her family applied for immigration to the United States. After four applications, and being denied the first three times, Ms. Greenwald and her family are successful. On December 23, 1958, she arrived on American soil leaving behind a town and country ravaged by the push and pull of Hitler's Holocaust.

Today, Susan Greenwald lives in Contra Costa County with her husband and has two daughters. Each year Susan visits local schools to give students a firsthand account of that harrowing passage in history. She follows American politics and votes as a citizen on a regular basis as she knows, perhaps better than anyone; the impact politics can have on our lives.

Assemblymember Jean Fuller
District 32



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Samuel Young

Interviewed by Stephen Jacob Brudvig,
Hayley O'Grady & Austin Wood

Samuel Young

By Stephen Jacob Brudvig

One Man's Unique Story During the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, there were many people who went through and witnessed things that, in the normal course of human existence, should never have to be faced. The atrocities that so many people went through are legendary, taking on an aura of sadness, tragedy, and even hope. The Holocaust may remind you of the story of Anne Frank and her struggles. However, not many people have heard of Sam Young, an elderly gentleman who now resides in Keene, California. At first glance, Mr. Young, or Sam as he likes to be called, is a normal human being. He has a house, a wife, friends, and a successful business. These things in themselves may be considered success in modern life, yet his real "success" is found in his unique and inspiring story of survival during the Holocaust.

Sam was born on the 22nd of December, 1922 in what was known as the Czech Republic. His father was a prominent town physician and his mother was actually a farmer. The town that Sam was born in had a population of around 12,000 and actually has several different names. The Czech name for the town was Sevelas, the Russian name for the town currently is Vino Gradova, and the Hungarian name for the town was Sevlus, which means vineyards. While his father worked as a physician, his mother would work running the family farm, which grew mostly tobacco.

As with most Jewish Families, his Father and Mother valued education. Because of this, Sam attended Czech school until 1933; he was ten years of age. His parents then transferred him to Hebrew school where he attended until he graduated in 1941. During his time at Hebrew school, Sam saw the world around him change. In 1937, Adolf Hitler ordered the annexation of part of the Czech Republic called the Sudetenland. According to Hitler, this land was traditionally German and should be returned to Germany. While many were opposed to this, they had no choice. Another change was the constant pressure on the Jewish people by new racist laws. While at first these laws were small in nature, they grew. An example of the later harsher laws was that Jewish people could not own a business. While many people simply went into partnership with a non-Jewish person, it had an effect on the Jewish people both monetarily and mentally.

Once Sam finished Hebrew school, he worked as a supervisor for several months on the family farm until the 15th of July, 1941. On that day, Sam was working on the farm when suddenly his parents sent word for him to return home. When he got there, the Hungarian police were waiting to take his mother, father, sister, and himself to the next town for one night. They were told that it was just a processing formality and that they needed to pack for just one night since they would return the next day. The odd thing about this was that the Hungarians seemed to take people at random. Sam's grandparents were not taken and out of the 400 to 500 other people taken, only a few of

them had their entire family called for the “processing.” Being forced to go, Sam’s family and the other’s were loaded up in military trucks where they were taken to box cars. All the people were loaded up into the box cars which had no water, food, restrooms, or provisions of any kind. They were treated like cattle.

When the long box car journey ended, the group was not in the next town as they were told; rather they were at the border of Hungary in a town called Jasina which was in the Carpaten Mountains. Here, the people were lead to a saw mill where they stayed until they went in front of the military leaders for “processing.” These military leaders asked for their names, and the people had to give up any gold, silver, and money that they had with them. Once everyone was processed, Sam and everyone else were led to trucks which took them into Russia which at that time was occupied by the Germans. Since Russia was a war zone at that time, the bridges and roads were primarily destroyed. Many times, the people had to get out of the trucks, walk across the rivers or poor roads, and then were loaded again into the trucks.

During one of these transfers, a woman fell and hurt herself during the switch. Sam’s dad, being a physician, went and helped the woman. For some reason, his dad took a while to get back. When he finally did, one of the Hungarian guards got angry at Sam’s father and went to strike him with his gun, but Sam blocked the Hungarian’s arm. Madly, the guard walked away, or so Sam thought. When the trucks started back up, Sam was in the front of the back truck. He overheard the guard say to another guard that when the truck had to stop again, Sam was to be shot because of his insolence of touching the Hungarian. Well, Sam was not about to die, so when the convoy stopped again, he saw a cemetery with a small retaining wall. Immediately, Sam jumped and hid behind this wall. Thankfully, the police did not find him. Once everyone was unloaded, the Hungarians told the people not to go back to Hungary and simply drove off.

After a few minutes, Sam came out of hiding and around that time, the local Ukrainian militia came upon these people. They led the people to the local Ukrainian village where they were told to go into a very large stable which used to hold Arabian horses. A man named Lanzkoronsky had left the facility, so it was open. There were a few dead horses left, but it had water so the people were happy. The people in the town were relatively friendly. A local Polish man let the people eat from his potato farm.

It was here that a chance sickness would lead to a remarkable friendship. In the village, there was a woman who was sick. Sam’s father went to help and it was here that he was told the entire area had but one doctor, Dr. Lachwicz. His father asked to see the doctor and soon enough, Dr. Lachwicz and Sam’s father became friends. The doctor asked Sam’s father and his family to come work with him. Once they arrived at the doctor’s house, they learned just how compassionate the doctor was. They were greeted by Dr. Lachwicz and his wife who led them to where food and a bath were waiting for all of them. While the food was simply some hard boiled eggs, milk, and bread, Sam stated that since he really hadn’t eaten anything of substance in a long time, it was probably the best meal of his life.

Later on, Sam learned just how lucky he was that his father was a physician. You may be asking, “What happened to the other people?” Well, after a while, they were led to a village called Kanenepz Podolsk where they were told that they were going back to Hungary. The trucks came up to load the people, but when they opened up the back flap of the truck to let the people in, there were machine guns. All but 3 men whom had gone to get water were shot and murdered.

While Sam’s family lived with the Lachwicz’s the local people would exchange what they had, chicken, apples, wood, etc. for medical aid from Sam’s father. At this time, all medical supplies had been taken away, so Sam’s father had to come up with improvisational medicine. For example, many people suffered from an iron deficiency at that time. The solution Sam’s father came up with was to have the people take apples and put some rusty iron nails in them. After a while, he would take out the nails and tell the people to eat the apples. A simple solution, but effective.

The family lived with Dr. Lachwicz’s family for about a year. While they were better off than many Jews in the area, times were still tough. The local police, in order to “snuff” out the Jews, made it illegal to get wood from the local forest. So, what food the people could get, it was almost impossible to cook. Also during this time, the police asked for several Jewish men, for what he does not know. Since Sam was a Jew, the local community picked him as one of the men to be one of the Jewish men picked to go with the police. Of course, the town was interested in saving their own men. Dr. Lachwicz asked the Jewish community to not make Sam go, but they would not budge.

Fortunately for Sam, Dr. Lachwicz treated a Gestapo officer for some medical problem that he had. After the treatment was completed, Dr. Lachwicz got the officer so drunk that he convinced him to go to the Jewish community and tell them not to make Sam go with the police. The officer agreed and Sam and his mother carried the officer through the snow to the local Jewish community where he ordered them to not make Sam go. Since they could not ignore this order, Sam was free.

After a year of living with Dr. Lachwicz, however, the family could not take it anymore. The conditions were so bad that they decided to somehow get back into Hungary. After a year of hiding and moving, they finally got back to Hungary. On this trip though, Sam learned just how bad people were living. If you have ever heard of nettle or “stinging nettle,” you know how much it stings. Well, in order to get food, Jews were boiling it down for the protein and eating it. The only way that Sam’s family got back was with the help of a smuggler who got them across the border into Hungary.

Once back, Sam’s family lived peacefully for a while, but soon after, Sam was forced into the Jewish division of the Hungarian army. While he was officially part of the Hungarian army, he was sent to a forced labor camp. Luckily for Sam, he liked horses and so at the camp, he was made a stable boy. The stable boys had an actual cabin that they lived in, which was still a very poor place to sleep, but it was better than everyone else who lived in the open air quarters.

After a while, the camp leader asked for anyone who was a metal shaper/ dye maker. Sam figured he had nothing to lose, and there were rumors circulating that the other camp had better living conditions. So, he raised his hand and went to the new camp in Budapest. There, the sleeping quarters were a little better and the food rations were also better. The interesting thing was that Sam had no idea how to shape or work metal. He gave the name of a dye maker in his village that he “apprenticed” under so he would not get in trouble, but the only way he survived was by the help of the other men at this camp who liked him.

On the weekends, the men were actually allowed to go into Budapest and receive packages. It was in Budapest that Sam met his future wife, who was part of the underground network. Sam worked at this camp for a while until the facility was completely bombed out and they were forced to move the camp 40 miles outside of Budapest. Luckily though, with the aid of his girlfriend, who worked in the underground network (who would one day become his wife); Sam was able to escape the camp. Once he did, Sam joined the underground network and tried to help others who needed help.

Sam helped the underground until he was recaptured. Sam was interrogated, tortured and got the “crud” beat out of him, but he did not give in. Once his captors gave up, they made him work in a weapons distribution center. Here, Sam would help load trucks for the Germans. Every once in a while though, one of the trucks would get a flat tire and Sam would get a jack and help fix the tire. After a while, the guards became used to Sam grabbing the jack. One day, a truck got a flat so Sam went to get the jack. He got past the guards and once he was out of sight, Sam ran off and escaped again. Because of Sam’s torture and the fact that he was known by his captors, he could no longer work in the underground network.

Sam stayed in hiding until the Russians surrounded Budapest in January 1945. Once the Russians captured the town, Sam had to prove who he was. In order to get back home, Sam was constantly interrogated. Finally, Sam figured out how to get around this. One of the Russian guards helped him make a paper which let him get to his home. The Russians required three things for a person to travel freely; a picture, an official stamp, and typed writing on a document, which would allow people to get wherever they wanted to go. This pass became Sam’s guardian. It finally got him back home.

Sam learned that his parents and sister had been sent to concentration camps because they were Jews. His father went to Auschwitz and his mother and sister went to work at the V-2 rocket factory. Luckily they survived.

Through a remarkable set of events that would be as long to write as the story up until now, Sam and his wife made it to America on the 13th of August, 1946 with only 3 dollars in his pocket. Luckily, Sam had an aunt in New York who let Sam and his wife stay with her for a few days. She gave them what little money she could spare and they left for new horizons. They went to Detroit, Michigan where Sam got a job earning \$30.00 a week at a lumber yard. He worked there until December, 1946.

At this time, Sam moved to Los Angeles and became a home improvement salesman. He was so successful that he was audited by the IRS the first year he worked because they refused to believe that he, a poor immigrant from Hungary, had made over \$11,000.00 his first year. At that time, \$11,000.00 was a large amount of money. After two years, he went into the home building business, where he is still partially active.

His wife died in 1971 and since then, Sam remarried. In 1978, Sam moved to Keene and bought the Keene ranch. He still lives there today.

Sam still supports Dr. Lachwicz's family for their help during the Holocaust. Unfortunately, Dr. Lachwicz disappeared mysteriously when he went to help a patient after the Russians took occupancy of the area. Dr. Lachwicz's family lost everything after that. To this day, Sam and Dr. Lachwicz's daughter still write each other letters.

I hope now that when you think of the Holocaust, you not only think of Anne Frank and other famous people, but all the Jews who experienced hell on earth during that period of history. There are so many people who went through experiences like Sam's. Sam says you can better understand the big picture if you can understand that while there were over 6 million Jews killed during the holocaust, over 51 million people in all were killed during WWII. The people of today need to get over their differences. After both World War I and World War II, both were declared as the "war to end all wars", yet conflict and war still exists. What happened to the Jews during WWII is happening to other people currently in places like Darfur, Rwanda, and the Sudan. Don't ever forget what evil is capable of. Remember our past, defend the innocent of the present, and plan to prevent atrocities in the future. Education is the only way I know of eliminating intolerance of others, and remembering the Holocaust victims honors them and keeps their memories alive. If forgotten, you have let Hitler and the Nazis win all over again.

By Hayley O'Grady

A Quest for Freedom

The first time that someone tried to kill Samuel Josipovits Young, he was only 18 years old. Samuel was born in Czechoslovakia on December 22, 1922. His parents were both born in what was Austria-Hungary at the time. His father was born into an intellectual family near the town that Samuel Josipovits grew up in. Samuel was raised in his mother's home town. His mother was born to a family of farmers and she continued farming after her marriage. There were about one thousand Jewish families in Samuel's small town. Though his aunts, uncles and grandparents died in the Holocaust, his family was one of the largest to survive.

Samuel's father was a doctor who practiced out of his home. Patients would knock on the windows, in the front of the house, to request medical assistance. Samuel's father was very busy and was not able to spend much time with his family; however,

Samuel's mother spent an abundance of time with her children. His mother taught him many things, including multiplication and division. At six years old, he went to Czech school. At ten years old, he went to another town for schooling and stayed with friends of the family. Samuel went to a Hebrew high school that had at most 450 students throughout his time there. He went to this high school, run by a Mr. Kugel, until 1938. He graduated in 1941.

In Samuel's opinion, one of the most important factors that contributed to his family's survival was the fact that they spoke many different languages. In his home, they spoke Hungarian. On his mother's farm, he learned Russian. In second grade, he learned Hebrew. These communication skills helped him to prevail through the horrors of the Holocaust.

On July 15, 1941 Samuel Josipovits and his family, along with other Jews, were taken from what was Hungary at the time. They were brought to Russia, which was occupied by the Germans, and left at Jageinica.

Samuel and his family went to live with a Catholic, Polish doctor named, Lachowicz. His family stayed with the doctor for one year. Samuel's father would practice medicine despite the terrible conditions. During that time, the police ordered all Jews to the town square, supposedly to be taken to another village. Samuel and his family did not go. The Germans shot down every Jew present in the town square. Three boys, who had strayed to get some water, saw what was happening on their way back. The boys ran and hid until it was safe for them to escape. The three boys witnessed the Germans killing approximately 400 – 500 Jews in the town square. One day Dr. Lachowicz went to see a patient and never came back. With no income, the doctor's wife and daughter left town; they had lost everything.

In July of 1941, the police came and told the Jews to pack enough for one night, because they were taking them to the next town. Samuel's mother packed a small suitcase and his father took his medicine satchel. The Hungarian police took the Jewish people to boxcars and they rode to the borders of Hungary. At the border, all the Jews were forced to sleep in a saw mill for the night. In the morning, the police took all the gold and silver that the Jews owned. Samuel was taken to a forced labor camp in 1943. He was about twenty years old. Samuel's parents and sister were taken to Auschwitz in July of 1944.

The camp, where Samuel was held, was located in Romania and was part of the Hungarian Army. Jews in the camp were supplied with a box of meager necessities. The box was about 3 feet by 18 inches by 18 inches deep. The box held clothes and any other possessions that the prisoners managed to retain. The camp was located in an area known as "A Gold Village" because gold had been found nearby.

The prisoners of the camp were ordered to construct a concrete building. This building was to be the prisoners' own sleeping quarters, but it was never finished. Therefore, prisoners were forced to sleep outside or underneath the unfinished building.

Prisoners tried to sleep on top of something or cover themselves with something to keep from freezing. They were rationed very little food; two pounds of rye bread had to last two days. Occasionally, they were given soup that was practically inedible. In the mornings, they were given coffee made from chicory and a little bread. There were few doctors and no sanitation methods whatsoever. Prisoners were forced to go out to a swamp to relieve themselves.

Samuel was transferred to a different labor camp. This enabled him to avoid being sent to the Russian front as labor support. This camp had better conditions. The camp was located in line with Chepel Island and surrounded by other camps. The camp was a big manufacturing base. Prisoners were given jobs to manufacture everything for the military. Samuel worked as a tool and die maker. In this new camp, they were provided with sleeping quarters and cold showers. After work, the prisoners were allowed to go into town. On Saturday at noon, half of the camp was released and expected back on Sunday evening. The other half was excused Sunday morning and was expected back on Monday at noon. Samuel's working group consisted of 400 people. Prisoners were also allowed packages from home.

In June of 1944, Great Britain began to bomb this camp and the surrounding camps. Many people died in the bombings due to various causes. Great Britain sent liberators regularly at eleven a.m. and five p.m. everyday. Conditions continued to worsen. Samuel escaped to the underground, in Budapest.

Samuel's family survived Auschwitz and was taken to other camps until they were rescued by the Russian army.

After escaping from the camps, Samuel became involved the underground Jewish rescue system. Conditions of this life were hard. Some survived by living with a Nazi, that way other Nazis would not come to check for them and take them away. Samuel was able to get a room with a women's prison matron and a Hungarian ship captain from the Dahub River.

At one point, the Russian police caught Samuel and took him in for interrogation. One of the interrogators recognized him from the underground. This interrogator ended up supplying Samuel with a paper to keep him from getting caught. The paper was written so that nobody could really read it. When Samuel showed it to a train conductor, he thought it was a ticket and Samuel was able to travel anywhere for free.

To resist the Nazis, Samuel carried a hand grenade and a gun, but he never killed anyone. He did get caught in November of 1944, and he received a beating, but he was able to escape the prison after three days.

People working in this underground system provided Jews with false papers and any other help they could provide. With these papers, they pretended they were not Jews. Samuel helped prisoners of Hungarian ghettos escape to Romania. From Romania they would go to Turkey and from there to Israel.

When Russia defeated the German and Hungarian Armies, Samuel returned to what he hoped would be Czechoslovakia. Shortly after his return, the Russians took over his home and he realized that he needed to escape. The conditions were not any better under the Russians than they had been under the Nazis. The police would arrest anyone without reason. Samuel and his girlfriend fled to Prague. There, he became a student at the University. When communism won in the Czech elections, a law was passed mandating young men to serve in the army for three years. Samuel was able to get a passport and escape August 13, 1946 to New York. Once in the United States, Samuel changed his name to Samuel Josipovits Young, using his former last name as his middle name.

Samuel moved to the San Fernando Valley. When his father retired, his parents moved from New York to Los Angeles. Samuel had married his girlfriend in 1945 inside Russia. Her name was Irene. They had a son and an adopted granddaughter. Samuel's father sent money to the widow of Dr. Lachowicz on a regular basis. After his death, Samuel continued to send money to the wife and daughter of the kind doctor.

Samuel's first wife passed away in 1971, and he married Betty in 1973. He is still married and living in Keene, California. His sister, Handa, is married and living in Hollywood. His parents passed away in the United States.

Samuel Young helps us to visualize what happened. He and other survivors are important links to remind us of those horrors we cannot fathom. The Holocaust was a devastating period of our history, a time we must remember and prevent from happening again.

By Austin Wood

Surviving the Holocaust: A True Survivor

On December 22, 1922, a courageous man named Samuel was born in Czechoslovakia to Mr. and Mrs. Josipovits. Mrs. Josipovits was a farmer and Mr. Josipovits was a doctor. Samuel Young had a younger sister named Handa, who was two years younger than him. Mr. Young was a very smart child. When Samuel was six years old, he went to a Czechoslovakian school. At ten years old, he went to a different town for schooling and stayed with family friends. He attended a Hebrew high school run by Mr. Kugel until 1938. As a child, Mr. Young recalls that the Jewish and non-Jewish folks got along just fine. Czechoslovakia was a democratic country and they all lived in harmony, until Adolf Hitler came into power and took over.

In June of 1941, the Germans battled the Russians. The Germans then occupied Russia. Mr. Young was among a group of Jews taken from Hungary to Russia by the Hungarian Police. They were dropped at Jagelnci. On July 15, 1941, police came in the morning and told them they were taking him and his family to the next city. The police

told them that they would only need enough for the night. Mr. Young's mother packed only the essentials for the family, assuming they would only be gone for a night. Mr. Young's father was a doctor and always carried his medicine bag with him, so that too came with them. The Hungarian Police took the family and other Jews to the train station in box cars. They were then taken to the border of Hungary and they were put into a sawmill for the night. The next morning, the police took everyone's valuables including anything that contained gold or silver. The police also took their IDs. They were put into military trucks and taken into the Russia.

Between July of 1941 and June of 1942, Mr. Young was in Russia occupied by Germans. Mr. Young and others from Hungary were taken to Jagelnci; Mr. Young and his family stayed with a Polish doctor, Mr. Lachowicz, and his family for a year. He was a Catholic man and a wonderful person who tried to help everyone in every possible way he could. The rest of the families from Hungary were taken to Kamenell Podolsk, and the Germans killed all of them except for three men. The three who avoided death were getting water. They saw what the Germans were doing to the others, and they escaped. At this time, things were pretty bad, but they got better in Hungary. Mr. Young was then smuggled back into Hungary in July of 1942.

In August of 1943, Mr. Young was taken to a forced labor camp in Romania, due to his age. He was between the ages of twenty and twenty-one. Mr. Young's family stayed in Hungary until 1944. Then they were taken to Auschwitz. The forced labor camp was part of the Hungarian Army. The Jews which were part of the labor camp, had to supply necessities for themselves. The only supplies that the Hungarian Army supplied them with was the military army camp. These groups of Jews were supposed to be a support group for the military.

In December of 1943, Mr. Young was taken to another labor camp. The English translation for the camp was, "A Gold Village," because gold had been found in this particular village. In the camp, Mr. Young was given a small box to keep his clothing in. At this certain camp in Romania, there was a concrete building that had started being built, but it was never finished. On really cold nights, Mr. Young and others in the camp would sleep underneath the unfinished building. Mr. Young had to sleep outside. To prevent himself from freezing, he would sit on a rock and try to cover himself. Mr. Young would sleep on one side and then once he could take the cold no longer, he would flip on his other side and sleep like that for a while. There was little food. Each morning each person got half of a four pound loaf of rye bread. This had to last for two days. For breakfast, Mr. Young would drink a cup of coffee made from chicory with some bread. There was soup that was also prepared, but most food served was pretty inedible. In the camp, there was really no form of a decent bathroom, so instead they would go into the swamp to relieve themselves. There was a medical division, but it was a place with few doctors and some inmates. In the camp, there was no sanitation whatsoever.

Mr. Young found out that the Hungarian Army was looking for trades' people to take to Budapest to a forced labor camp, which was used to manufacture everything for the military. It was a considerably better camp, and if Mr. Young did not go there, he

would most likely have been sent to the Russian front. Mr. Young lied and said he was a tool and dye maker, so he was sent to Budapest. The labor camp in Budapest was much better because there were sleeping quarters and they had cold showers to use. They were permitted to go to town after work. Half of the camp was let out Saturday at noon and had to be back by Sunday evening. Then the other half was let out Sunday morning and had to be back Monday by noon. Packages were allowed from home and they were allowed to have contact with people outside of the labor camp. There were about four hundred people working in the group. The labor camp was surrounded by other camps. Chepel Island was in the middle of the Duna River. On the Island, was the main military manufacturing base. Great Britain began bombing the facility. Planes flew over their camp and came everyday at eleven a.m. and five p.m. to drop bombs. The bombs always hit the camp Mr. Young was in, before it hit the Island. During the bombings, there was no shelter, so many workers were maimed or killed. When the bombs exploded, great air pressure was created, which caused many workers to not be able to breath. After their camp was totally destroyed and would not produce, they were relocated to a knitting factory that had been transformed into a military factory.

Things began to get worse, so Mr. Young decided to escape and join the Underground in Budapest. The goal of the Underground was to save as many lives from the Nazis as possible, by providing the Jews and others with clothes and false papers. They also helped people escape out of Hungary to Romania, Turkey, and Israel. The people who participated in the Underground had to protect themselves and their whereabouts. The best place for hiding was to live with real Nazis, because the Hungarian Nazis would go house to house arresting people and taking their food. However, houses of real Nazis were simply overlooked. While hiding in the Underground, Mr. Young lived with a Nazi family. The lady of the house often said that no Jew could hide in her house because she would be able to tell. Mr. Young always agreed with her, so he would not raise suspicion about not really being Nazi. The family was always very nice to Mr. Young. In November of 1944, Mr. Young was sent to prison for resisting the Nazis. However, he escaped the prison after about three days. A friend of Mr. Young gave him papers which were supposed to say that he had already been integrated by the Russians. With these papers, he would not have to be bothered again. His friend handwrote the papers instead of typing them, so nobody could understand the message, but it looked official, so they were always honored. Mr. Young got much use out of what he called his “piece of junk.”

In January of 1945, Russia defeated the German and Hungarian Armies and occupied Budapest. Mr. Young went back to his hometown, under the impression it was still Czechoslovakia. However, Russia had taken over and annexed it. Mr. Young and his girlfriend, whom he had met in the Underground, realized they had to escape. They escaped to Prague. Samuel Young entered Prague University as an engineer. Mr. Young thought he was going to finish going to school at the University. Situations under Russian rule were not any better than under the Nazis, but they did have different ideas than the Nazis. The Russians would arrest people for no good reason, and people would be called on to do something and would never be seen or heard from again. Elections came in Czechoslovakia, and the communists won. Also a law was passed, which stated

men had to serve in the Czechoslovakian Army for three years. So Mr. Young and his wife, with their passports, arrived on Staten Island in New York on August 13, 1946.

Mr. Young married his first wife, Irene, in Russia. They had a son together. However, Mr. Young's wife passed away. He remarried in 1973 to Betty. Mr. Young has many nieces and nephews from Betty's side of the family. He also has a grandchild, which his son from his first marriage adopted. Mr. Young lived in New York for a little while and then moved to the San Fernando Valley. His parents lived in New York, until his father retired, then his parents moved to Los Angeles. Out of all of the Jewish families in their communities, Mr. Young's family was the only family to survive as a whole. Mr. Young currently resides in Keene, California, with his wife Betty.

Mr. Young never met or saw Adolf Hitler, but he remembers the first time he heard his voice on the radio, as if it happened yesterday. Mr. Young can also recall when Hitler came to power in 1933 and began to blame all of Germany's problems on the Jews. Mr. Young has not made peace with the events that occurred during the Holocaust, and he will never forget what happened.

Mr. Young credits his survival to luck and the languages he knew. Mr. Young knows seven different languages. Mr. Young is a true survivor. He wants to spread the message that no one should let another human being control them, because the horrible events of the Holocaust can reoccur and can happen to anyone. The Holocaust was a devastating period in history. It must never be forgotten and we must always remember these horrific events, in order to prevent it from ever happening again.

*Assemblymember Loni Hancock
District 14*



*Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors*

Pauline Witriol

Interviewed by Miriam Barrere

Acknowledgements

*Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay
Dr. Anita Friedman, Executive Director
Rita Greenwald Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator/Case Manager*

Pauline Witriol

By Miriam Barrere

I Am Not Extraordinary

The following interview with Pauline Witriol was the first time that I have had an opportunity to talk with a Holocaust survivor about their experiences during WWII. I think that it is imperative that the survivor's stories are recorded, to share the effects the war had, to remember those who helped Jewish people, and to honor those who perished.

I was born in 1937, in a small shtetl in Poland. Poland before the war was a very primitive country. In the country-side and small towns everyone was a farmer. People ate what they raised and grew: eggs, goat, cabbage soup, milk and potatoes. On Easter maybe there would be a chicken. Also, the women baked enough bread for the whole week. If someone came unexpectedly, then there would be less bread. Especially after the war started, people didn't have anything extra to spare. If the milk went sour, so you made cheese, you didn't throw it out.

My mother once went to the local post office because she wanted to order toothbrushes for my sister and me from Krakow. She said the ladies at the post office exchanged glances as if to say, "Who needs a toothbrush? Only the Jews do."

On September first, 1939 the war broke out in Poland. I overheard the adults talking about what was happening and I remember seeing their worried expressions.

I was probably about four years old, so it was 1941. Some German soldiers came to our town and ordered the Jewish men to dig ditches along the side of the road. It was Shabbat and none of the men would work. The soldiers went away. A few days later they returned. That morning had been raining heavily and the roads were full of mud. They ordered everyone out into the streets. The men had to line up in the street and at a given signal they had to start running down the road and at another signal fall to the ground onto the muddy road. Then the whistle blew and they got up and ran some more and fell down again. All around the town, the women and children had to stand and watch. I remember seeing a soldier press his boot down on my uncle's head because my uncle hadn't put his head far enough into the mud.

The fall of 1942 was a hard one. I remember it was right around the High Holidays. I was five years old. It's when I remember that the neighbors started calling us *Jew*, in a derogatory way. After Yom Kippur all the Jewish citizens of the town were told they had to pack and leave the town. My mom dressed me and my sister in all the underwear, shirts, and pants we owned. Our whole family went to stay with family in another town; they couldn't really afford to keep us. I guess you could say that we stayed in the "living room," but that's really a modern term. All the men slept on one side of the

room and the women slept on another. There were no beds for us. We just slept in our coats on the floor.

One day all the men were taken away: my dad, uncles, male cousins, everyone. My sister was always a daddy's girl; she was devastated. She was screaming and crying. The men were taken to a labor camp in another town. The festival of Hoshanah Rabbah, the night before Simchat Torah, was the last time I saw my father.

In the winter of 1942 my family already had been exiled from our town and my father, along with other male members of our family, was put into a labor camp in a neighboring town. My father and my mother's brother, Yaakov, made their way back to our town to ask the priest there for baptismal certificates for us, my sister and I. He thought the certificates would make it safer for us to live with Polish people. They went to a Polish neighbor of ours, with whom we had hidden some valuables, including a sewing machine. A sewing machine was a coveted item in poor, rural Poland, where many people needed the means to make their own clothes and other household items. My father wanted to find this sewing machine to give to the people who promised to keep us. When this neighbor saw Jews at his door, he did not waste time in calling the Gestapo. The Gestapo put them into the back of a truck and drove off. My father jumped off and tried to run away and was immediately shot and killed. A more horrific death awaited my poor uncle Yaakov, who lost his life because of his love and devotion to his family.

Throughout the war my sister and I stayed with various Christian Polish families. These days I can't remember if it was seven or nine families all together. We couldn't stay with each family too long because they were so terrified of being found out and caught by the Gestapo, or the Polish police. Plus, it was war-time and no one had enough food to feed their own family, let alone extra people.

I remember one time when my sister and I were walking to another household. It was the wintertime and there was snow on the ground. We were walking next to the train tracks, and as a train passed by, the adult with us told us to wave because our mother was on that train.

The family we stayed with next hid us under the kitchen floorboards, in a hole in the dirt. That family had a dog outside that would bark when people came to the house to visit. One day our mother came to the house and saw us in the hole, all dirty, and she started crying. We asked her why she was crying, she said she was so happy to see us. We said, if you are so happy to see us why aren't you laughing. She replied I've forgotten how to laugh. We thought that was so funny, how could she forget to laugh? When it was time for her to go we refused to say good-bye.

Overnight between families again, once we stayed in an abandoned house. It was a Jewish house, who else would it have belonged to? We were given bread and water to eat, and told to stay under a table. There was a window above the table, and anyone passing would have seen us. We did go up to the attic though and found it filled with

books, Hebrew books. At one point we saw a rat and gave it some bread. We were just like that rat, dirty, unwanted.

My sister and I had each other for company and when we were lying in our hiding places, when strangers were visiting, after a length of time it was easy to forget ourselves and start to play and whisper. Then the woman of the house would quickly stamp her feet and say something like, "Darn these mice!" This was a signal to us that we had been heard. If the visitors present were wise to the situation, they never let on, fortunately for us.

In one family we were hidden on top of their stove. They had a cooking oven and a brick oven that stuck out into the next room where there was space on top. We were hidden on top, with boxes all around us. One day the couple's two children started fighting right below us. The sister started crying and crying. As we peered around the boxes one fell. Someone walking by came into the house to see what was going on, and saw us on top of the oven. The father of the house ran in from the field terrified that the police were going to come. He marched us way out into the forest and hide us there without any food or water.

The people who kept us could not confide in any neighbor or friend for fear that they would be given away for the Gestapo and then, together with the whole family we would all be shot. The women in some of these families, because of their greater sympathy for little children, would sometimes take much abuse from their husbands and grown children because of this real and terrible fear. Some of the women would be able to confide in the nuns who came to visit. The nuns would nod and smile to us with gentle smiles, and sometimes bless us or give us religious medals to wear on pretty blue ribbons. At such times we were able to feel that it shouldn't be held against us that we were Jews.

A few months after the war we were taken from the Polish family by an aunt, who had been liberated from a concentration camp. We were on a train. Suddenly I recognized a Polish woman in the next seat as an old neighbor from our town. I ran over to greet her, and expected her to be happy to see me. But she just looked at me with a mixture of surprise and disgust. "Oh, you're still alive?" she said.

In Germany, in about 1946, I found that going to America was not so easily accomplished. My uncle, Avram, put me into an orphanage, with the hope (and rumor) that the quota for orphaned children would allow me to reach my destination with less red tape. In this orphanage I lived with other Jewish children whose families had not survived the war. There we waited and worried whether we would be healthy enough to be allowed to go to America. Some of the stories of what the Americans would require of us in quickness of mind bordered on sadistic. One story was that the American consul had asked a prospective immigrant: "If you were coming to America and the ship you were traveling on started to sink and a Russian ship came to rescue you, what would you do?" None of us could decide whether the correct answer was "I want to live," or "I'd rather be dead than Red."

Assemblymember Mary Hayashi
District 18



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Doreet Naidus

Interviewed by Nadeah Vali

Acknowledgements

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Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator/Case Manager

A Child's Journey to Escape Persecution

Bratislava was a typical bustling city to many in the former Czechoslovakia, however, for Doreet it was an unique and unexpected destination within a journey that unfolded with each small step she took as a three year old. Tightly gripping her mother's hand in the dark night, her family traveled from Austria to the Czech border. Doreet, her two year old brother, mother, and father always traveled by night so that they would not be sighted by the authorities. Posing as Czech natives, her family was lucky enough to escape from Austria across the border to Bratislava in the former Czechoslovakia.

Doreet was born in Vienna, Austria. By her third birthday she became a refugee fleeing Vienna. Doreet recalls her family explaining that conditions in Germany leading up to the war were marked by a weak economy and social divisions. Germany was fertile breeding ground for exploitation of social rifts. Hitler promoted a racist ilk of fascism that exacerbated social divisions to address Germany's economic shortfalls and political resentment from the Treaty of Versailles. On January 30, 1939, Hitler declared that Germany was at war. The world swiftly became immersed in what became known as World War II. Hitler ushered in an era of an ideology of white supremacy in Doreet's homeland on her mother's birthday, March 12, 1938. Persecuted populations in the Holocaust included Jews, Gypsies, people of color, prostitutes, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, people with disabilities, and political prisoners. The Holocaust claimed the lives of 6 million Jews and 5 million others from the various aforementioned persecuted groups.

Doreet's family's journey was marked by instability, scarcity of food and shelter, and hiding throughout the war. The fear of being arrested for aiding and abetting refugees from Vienna made it close to impossible for her family to find safe harbor. Some people would only allow her family to stay for one night, if they were so kind. They were forced to find new shelter often, if not every day; living each day in constant flux, insecurity and threat of being arrested. Once they passed the hurdle of crossing the Czech border, they eventually continued their journey towards Romania. Doreet's father had relatives, his dad and step mom's family, in Romania. However, these relatives were not willing to shelter them for longer than one week because they were afraid of getting arrested for harboring them. Instead, Gypsies and prostitutes gave them safe shelter. When her family tried to get employment, go out to get food, or just walk on the streets, individuals or authorities would identify them and detain them. The constant fear of being stopped and asked to show their papers regarding legal passage and residence haunted their every move. The intimidating environment was an obstacle her family had to bare in order to survive, Doreet described. Immigration status was a conduit for Nazi's to get Jews and other targeted populations in their custody. Once they were in local custody, they would then be turned over to Nazi authorities. When her family did get

arrested and detained, they escaped while en route to other jails or camps whenever they had an opportunity to do so. This was the cycle her family endured for the eight years they fled.

Doreet's experience was indicative of numerous people who attempted to flee from Nazi persecution. However, according to Doreet, her family was extremely lucky to have left Vienna when they did, safely crossed borders, and stayed together as a family. Countless other Jews, Gypsies, people of color, prostitutes, homosexuals, and other persecuted minorities were not as relatively fortunate. Doreet explained that her family took heed of the rumors that had spread about a possible holocaust and left Austria in 1938. That cautious response may have saved her family from worse hardships. Her family was never separated, except for one time when detained in jail. In that situation her father was in one cell and Doreet, her mother, and her brother were in another. Her family spent intermittent periods of time at forced labor and concentration camps. At the forced labor camp, Doreet and her brother occupied themselves playing together while her mother worked on a farm and her father on the railways. They had very little food and suffered from malnutrition. Her family's time in the camps and the cycle of arrest and escape finally ended when the war officially came to an end in 1945.

Unfortunately ethnic cleansing has occurred numerous times in history, to numerous populations, in countries all over the world. The 1938-45 Holocaust resembles the atrocities that occurred in Rwanda and Bosnia. As a society, we must remain vigilant that such persecution does not occur to any targeted group. Humanity learns to question, analyze norms, and prioritize human rights as time passes. Doreet hopes people never have to see or experience tragedies like the Holocaust. She hopes children do not have to lose their childhood due to malignant, racist and fascist political struggles. She wants children to have the little pleasures like eating sweets and being carefree. Doreet recalls the first day she tasted chocolate herself as a child. Victorious troops marched through the streets celebrating the country's liberation and threw chocolates into the crowds. That day she tasted chocolate for the first time in her life, at 11 years old. She remembers what a delicious new taste it was. It truly was a sweet beginning.

Today, Doreet lives a peaceful life with her family in Dublin, California in the 18th Assembly District. The hardships she has overcome are an inspiration to other survivors and to the community at large.

Assemblymember Shirley Horton
District 78



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Gussie Zaks

Interviewed by Megan Doyle

“If I Don’t Tell It, Who Will?”

When taking classes at my university on World War II and the Holocaust, I was never as immersed in the lives of the prisoners as I was while listening to the courageous story of Gussie Zaks. Gussie rightfully earned the nickname of “Gutsy” by local students after recounting the chilling stories of her adolescence in auditoriums, churches, synagogues, and other public venues all around San Diego. She has been telling her story for over 40 years and I was lucky enough to share this experience as well.

Gussie Zaks, the youngest of seven children, was born in Klobuck, Poland over 80 years ago. She, along with one sister, is the only remaining sibling of her family, and a few of the only survivors of over 300 extended family that fell victim in the Holocaust. In 1933 when Hitler took power in Germany, Gussie and her family knew of the impending danger, but had no place to go and did not want to pack up and move because there was not yet a major threat to Poland, or so they thought. Unlike many stories of the Holocaust, Gussie and her family did not move to one of the large ghettos, but she was shipped to an open, working camp by herself. While at working camp, Gussie’s whole family was taken from her home and shipped off to Treblinka, a death camp. The only way that Gussie learned of her family’s fate was from a cousin whom she found much later on who had managed to escape Treblinka. She recounts the horror that her sister faced in the camp when her young child was pushed into the “death” line off of the train and her sister was chosen to live. At that point her sister joined the child and they both were escorted to the gas chambers.

Meanwhile, Gussie’s working camp was closed and the 1000 girls were transported to a selection camp. In this camp the women were all lined up and 200 were chosen to go to work, and the rest perished. Gussie was a very short and tiny girl, and would have never been selected to work without the help of two sisters who were also in line. The two girls saw Gussie crying at the thought of her fate and through the excruciating hours of selection, they lifted her up under her armpits to make her appear taller to the men walking around doing the selection. When the men passed they would set her down and lift her again every time they rounded the line. It was because of these two girls that Gussie was selected as one of the 200 that would work. In this camp, the girls made thread and lived in very harsh conditions. They didn’t have much to eat, Gussie explained, but they did not think about it. Every day that they woke up was another day that they had not been chosen for death.

In 1944 the girls heard Russian guns approaching, but they were not there to help, and the people running the camp herded all of the girls out into the snow for a twelve week death march. Throughout the beginning of this march, they lost many girls to fatigue and malnourishment. The only thing the girls were able to eat during the day was

snow, while they marched over the frozen ground in no set direction, just marching to their deaths. At night, they would stop at farmer's barns along the road and the remaining 80 girls all piled in to sleep. It was at this point that Gussie and one of her friends had a strategy to survive. There was only one German guard at night, and he was very easy to sneak by, so the girls would sneak off to other farmer's houses and pretend that they were German girls who had lost their family. Gussie said that her friend spoke German best and so she was the spokesperson to the families. Often times when asking for food, the girls were turned down and told that the family had none to spare. It was at this point that the girls would run into the kitchen, grab whatever scraps of food that they could off of the table, and run out into the snow again. Some nights it was only a corner of a piece of bread, but they weren't concerned with being full until morning, because they never knew if they would wake up to march another day.

At the end of the twelve week march, the girls arrived in Flossenburg, a men's camp, where they were told that they would get a shower. The girls had heard the horror stories about the showers and were prepared for their death. At this point they hoped for death, they had endured so much and had no hope for escaping. They were stripped of their clothes, shaved, sprayed in Lysol, and to their amazement, the showers turned on and real water poured out. This completely shocked the girls and they were thankful for the shower, since they had not had one in months, but still did not want to face any more torture.

The march continued on until the girls were put onto trains. They shoved 80 girls into a train. Gussie recounted that not many girls made it out of the cars because they rode for three days without any food or water and they were not able to sit, it was standing room only. When they got out of the cars, they had to help each other down and often times they were not able to walk because of their horrible physical conditions. They marched the rest of way to Bergen-Belsen, the same Camp where Anne Frank lost her life. Gussie was sure she would not make it out of this death camp, but one night she heard the loudspeaker and something she did not understand. England had come to liberate the camps and was telling the prisoners that they were free, but nobody spoke English and did not understand what was going on. The tanks brought water for the prisoners, who had not had any water in three weeks, but because of the prisoner's diseases and physical conditions, they developed Typhus after drinking the water. The nurses and doctor's came to help the prisoners and started giving them food little by little so that their small stomachs could handle it. Gussie, though, was not in good shape, could not eat, drink, or even stand up. At only eighteen and a half years old, she was marked to die by the doctors treating her.

"Gutsy" Gussie Zaks pulled through, though, and made a full recovery. The Red Cross took her to Sweden to heal and she loved it so much, she didn't even want to leave when she found out that she had a relative still living. Gussie had gone from not being able to walk, to slightly overweight while living in Sweden, and had made many close friends, some of whom she still knows.

From Sweden, Gussie moved to her Aunt's home in Belgium, where she was treated like another daughter (and sometimes better than her cousin) and was eventually married and had two children. Gussie moved out of Europe and to New York and hated it at first, but soon fell in love with the city and the country. She ended up meeting up with a friend from elementary school in Poland and getting remarried to him and now she not only has grandchildren, but great grandchildren.

Gussie and her husband live in a lovely home in the community of San Carlos in San Diego, California, but one could not say that she lives a quiet life. Gussie devotes all of her time to the community. She has been president of the local organization of Holocaust survivors four times , and speaks at all of the local schools, churches, clubs, and other organizations about her experiences during World War II, touching students, teachers, and everyone she comes into contact with. Gussie has an amazing story to tell and I was privileged enough to be able to hear this story. As Gussie says "If I don't tell the story, who will?"

Assemblymember Guy Houston
District 15



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Ellen Nebel

Interviewed by Scott Cullinane

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Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay
Dr. Anita Friedman, Executive Director
Rita Greenwald Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator/Case Manager

Where Life Takes Us

What does “stateless” mean? How does one become “stateless?” How does it feel to have a passport that reads your home as “stateless?” Ellen Nebel knows and she is, unfortunately, not the only one who knows.

The hateful acts of the Nazi’s are well known today, as are the acts that were inspired by that hate. The death camps and what happened there is well documented. Recalling the gritty and tragic lives of those who were sent to these places of death still causes tears today. The grey malaise of hopelessness was infectious, and only a rare individual was able to avoid being suffocated by it.

World War II was truly a world war; it took the ordinary lives of people and set them spinning off their normal courses. This included many Jewish people, such as Ellen Nebel who was a very young girl when the Nazis rose to power in Germany. Her story is a story of a life interrupted and sent in an entirely different direction by the rise of the Nationalist Socialist German Workers’ Party in Germany.

Ellen grew up in Hanover, Germany, living with her two parents and several siblings. Her life was comfortable. Her mother was a concert pianist and her father ran a dry goods store. Her life as a young girl was good, if yet undistinguished by history. Her family, though Jewish, was not strictly observant. While growing up, one of her favorite memories was how every Sunday morning she would walk in the park with her brother and her father and did math problems in her head. To this day she says that doing this helped her with math all her life. Her parents kept her insulated from the growing anti-Semitism in Germany during the 1930s. She describes her life then simply, “before Hitler came to power we grew up [just] like you grow up [now].”

Growing up during the 1930’s in Germany, despite the efforts of her parents, she could not help but be aware of the political climate during those years, but her parents kept her insulated from knowing everything. She went to school with members of the Hitler Youth, but seemed never to fully appreciate what that meant. It seems likely that Ellen’s parents were all too aware of what was happening, but she was young and was spared knowing the truth longer than many others were. All that changed in late 1939.

In 1939, by chance, Ellen’s parents were offered the opportunity to get some of their children out of Germany. Ellen never saw from her parents how difficult a choice it must have been for them. Her parents had to make up their mind in one night- that was all the time they had. She can only imagine her parent’s anguish as they counted down the days until she actually left. Finally, in January 1940, Ellen left her home in Hanover for Holland as a young girl of 13. Before she left, her parents told her that they would be together again soon, and then they could all go to America together. She traveled on a

kindertransport, a children's refugee transport, full of other kids that were in the same situation. Some of those children were too young to realize what was happening. That train was doing more than just taking Ellen to Holland; it was setting her on a path that would change her life completely.

On the train she describes the atmosphere as being quite innocent. Ellen is sure they were all scared, but no one showed it. Everyone was so young; to them it was a big adventure- bordering on the romantic. On the train there was a rumor that the children's bags were going to be inspected. The children were all told very specifically what they could and could not bring with them. Some, fearing trouble, threw some of their belongings out of the train. Though Ellen did not know it then, but not all of the children on that train would successfully escape the Nazi death camps.

When they arrived in Holland they were first deloused, then put in what Ellen best describes as a hostel. She still cringes remembering the nasty smell of the delousing. All the children were divided by sex and kept there under close supervision for about a month. After that the children were all moved to another location in Holland. The children spoke to no one in Holland, not out of fear, but simply because they only spoke German and could not communicate. The best way she can describe how they were treated was that they were like "orphans," even though they all still had their parents and Ellen was even still in contact with hers. She was able to talk to them by telephone and even received care packages from them.

Ellen's life took a dramatic turn when, in May 1940, Germany invaded Holland. She recalls now, "We saw planes, we saw parachutists jump out of planes, hanging in trees. They were shot and all that kind of stuff." Her parents had sent her away from Germany, hoping to keep her safe, but now the war had been brought to her in the most literal way. The violence she witnessed in Holland gave her disdain for television violence that persists even now. "I lived violence; I don't have to watch it."

One day, the group of children, from four to fourteen years old, was loaded onto buses and driven for several hours to the coast. When the buses finally stopped, all the children could see a ship resting at anchor. The children were rushed aboard; Ellen carried nothing with her and had only what she was wearing. Ellen was standing on deck as the ship began to move, but at the same time she could see more people on land running towards the ship and waving their arms in the air for it to wait. The ship did not, and these unfortunate refugees were left behind.

The ship Ellen found herself on was a cargo ship from the Dutch East Indies and was far from being suited for its new found task as a passenger transport. What little food there was consisted mainly of biscuits, which they ate in darkness so that they could not see the maggots in their food. These poor conditions on the ship were exacerbated when the ship came under an air attack by German planes. The German Air Force, the *Luftwaffe*, dropped bombs aimed at the ship, but though some came close, none hit the ship Ellen was on. There were about 150 children on board the ship, but no one was in charge of them, they were on their own. What stands out in Ellen's mind is how the older

children stepped forward to take care of the younger ones; this is a theme that Ellen witnessed over and over again for the next few years.

After several days of sailing, and much stress on the part of the passengers, the ship arrived safely in Ireland. However, the Jewish refugees were promptly denied permission to enter Ireland and never even left the ship. After the disappointment and more days at sea, Ellen and her fellow refugees pulled into Liverpool harbor one night in 1940. It was finally here that they were accepted and allowed to disembark.

In Liverpool, by total coincidence, Ellen's aunt and her cousin were working as domestic servants. Ellen and all the children were taken off the ship and held by the authorities until arrangements for all of them could be made. They were held in this manner because the British feared that German spies might be amongst the legitimate Jewish escapees. Ellen's cousin, Martha, knowing that this ship came from Holland, and that Ellen was in Holland, took a chance to come try and find her. Martha, posing as the wife of a member of the local Jewish committee, snuck in and found Ellen. It was only then that Ellen discovered what happened to her parents.

Ellen's parents had fled their home in Hanover and had gone east. They had traveled by train to Istanbul, Turkey. Her mother was teaching piano and her father was giving the British soldiers lessons in German. Martha was also able to convey to Ellen's parents in Istanbul that Ellen was safe for the moment. Later, Ellen would be able to write letters to her parents by passing mail through a contact in Zurich, but that took months. Other than those rare letters, she was cut off from her parents.

Ellen did not stay in Liverpool long. Soon she along with many other Jewish children from the continent were taken to the city of Manchester, separated by sex, and held in a closely supervised dormitory setting. In Manchester all the Jewish children lived communally. She recalls how any privacy you could get was very scarce and much valued. Even the showers were communal. This experience drew her closer to those around her in a way few other things could. Looking back on it now she almost marvels at the way in which such young people, children really, came together in order to live.

Ellen had to learn English to survive. When she turned sixteen she was required to do war work and she operated a machine that sewed part of the pocket on military uniform trousers. It was a job called "bar tacking" and Ellen remembers how on occasion a girls' finger would get stuck in the machine, but thankfully that never happened to her. Manchester, where Ellen worked and lived during the war, was a major industrial center in England, and as such did not go unnoticed by the Germans.

To harm the British war-effort, the *Luftwaffe* sent bombers on night raids against Manchester. Ellen would go to her bed, sleep a few hours, then when the air raid alarms sounded, she would go down to the basement for safety and sleep on the cement floor. During the blitz, when the *Luftwaffe* visited every night, she would not even go to her bed, but go straight to the basement and spend the whole night there. This was Ellen's childhood, working during the day, spending the nights on the floor in a basement.

Ellen's teenage years were devoid of many of the normal activities, joys, and romances of adolescence. Referring to her teenage years, Ellen says, "We just didn't have it." One of the pleasures she did have was listening to the radio and the music that was played from the Manchester concert hall. She longed to see it because she had heard how beautiful it was, but it was not possible for her to go beyond her work and the building where she lived. Because her mother was a pianist, the music seemed to remind her of home and provided her some comfort.

Ellen stayed in Manchester until the war ended in 1945. She remembers May of that year, five years after she left Holland, when the British literally danced in the streets. Ellen does not remember when exactly she learned about the death camps and the full extent of what went on there, but shortly after the war ended she came face to face with the reality of what the Nazi's had done in other parts of Europe. In England she met a group of children who had been rescued from the camps. When she met them, they immediately hated her because she spoke German and not Yiddish like them. When food was put in front of them they devoured it like animals and hid food in their clothing. The dehumanization was shocking. In her own words, she "was lucky" to have stayed out of the camps and avoid the fate that claimed so many others.

After the war she did not return to Germany, but remained in England. Ellen was now almost twenty. Europe in 1945 was a decimated and confused place. Ellen was poor, and given the state of things, she remained where she was in England, unable to be reunited with her parents. Ellen remained in the community of Jewish war refugees and became part of a Kibbutz. It was a "farm school," officially known as Whittingehame House in Scotland. Whittingehame House was an estate that was donated and owned at one time by the Earl of Balfour. Arthur Balfour had been a British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. He is famous for making the Balfour Declaration which was a significant statement of British support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in British Palestine.

Whittingehame House was created in 1939 to train and educate Jewish refugee youth to prepare them for the day when Hitler would be gone and they could return to Germany. Whittingehame House was self-sufficient and the occupants ranged in age from their late teens into their twenties. Ellen remained here for several years and recalls it fondly.

Many of the Jews that were at Whittingehame House ended up traveling to Israel, but Ellen did not. She instead went to London, working as a nurse for two boys from a wine merchant's family. In 1948 she married and in 1951 became pregnant with her first child. It was not until this late date she was able to travel across Europe to see her parents again. Her parents had last seen her as a young teenage girl, and she was returning to them both as a woman and mother. Eventually Ellen would find her way to America, and California where she now resides.

Later in her life she felt some resentment towards the Germans for what happened. When she would meet Germans after the war, she would think to herself how terribly unfair life was. She would try and calculate in her mind how old they were, where they must have been during the war. She would think how unfair it was about what happened then, but how now she and these Germans are speaking so politely together. Ellen would remember about her father who had been shot fighting for Germany in World War I, but later had to flee Germany for this life.

Her experience early in life taught her to appreciate what she had. Ellen has learned to always be ready. This shadow of anxiety about the future that she acquired as a child remains evident in her words, "I'm always prepared for disaster... because of my childhood." Ellen today lives quietly among us, her story of strength is a lesson about not letting bitterness ruin one's life. Because of the path she was forced to set out on in 1940 Ellen has held many jobs and happily describes herself as a "jack of all trades, but master of none." The events of her life have been so diverse and profound it challenges us to imagine what we would have done in her place.

After World War II, Ellen became a "stateless" individual, but she found a new home in America, and in California. We should all be proud of her and applaud what she has accomplished.

Assemblymember Jared Huffman
District 6



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Wilfred "Bill" Kay

Interviewed by Mia Newman

Henry Libicki

Interviewed by Nataly Man

"R"

Interviewed by Natalie Marsh

Irving Zale

Interviewed by Eli Paris

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Congregation Emanu-El

Wilfred "Bill" Kay

By Mia Newman

"I am here to tell my family's story, but that is an exception"

We are the chroniclers of history, the chroniclers of loss, the chroniclers of life, and most importantly, the chroniclers of the accumulated miracles that amounted to survival. Wilfred (Bill) Kay is a survivor, a brave and fortunate embodiment of all that word encompasses, and he fervently believes that the privilege of survival has come with the responsibility to share his story with the world.

Mr. Kay's story begins on May 16, 1928 in the town of Pultusk, Poland, about 40 miles north of Warsaw. Its population was almost 40 percent Jewish, but the Jewish community was mostly separated from the Christian one. Forbidden from owning land, the Jews of Pultusk made lives for themselves in commerce and trades, immersing themselves in their own traditions, language, and education system. Wilfred was born with the name Shlomo, the third child of seven, to Sara and Pesach Katz. They were an observant Jewish family--what today we would call "Orthodox"--and the weekly celebration of Shabbat was a special time for all of them. Friday nights, they could join together, clean and prepared for festivities. With a teacher and principal for a father, Wilfred particularly remembers being surrounded by an atmosphere that stressed the importance of education above all.

Yet Wilfred never even started 4th grade in Pultusk. The whispers of Nazism that he had begun to hear when Hitler expelled the Polish Jews from Germany grew to an ever-present threat of war by 1939. Mr. Kay vividly remembers the first time he heard Hitler on the neighbor's radio, and the fear it inspired in those around him. And then war came, on September 1, 1939, on the very day young Wilfred would have started 4th grade. School was cancelled, and the hopeful, 11-year-old student was crushed. There was no time for disappointment, however; his family was on the move. They rushed to grab their clothes and bedding before the war reached their doorsteps, neglecting even to take their family pictures, and began walking towards Warsaw, whose borders they thought afforded more protection than their own Pultusk. They never made it. As they walked, surrounded by others fleeing war, they shed belongings that became too heavy, finally arriving at the neighboring town of Wyszki as the day darkened. Against the sky they could see smoke rising from the town: the Germans had bombed. The Katz family pressed on, only to find that the bridge across the river Bug, the path to Warsaw, had been destroyed; they could not continue. As the men went to look for food, the family sought sanctuary and the hope of a night of safety in the town's synagogue.

"FIRE!" cried Pesach, waking his family in the early morning. The synagogue was on fire! A German soldier with a pistol was there to force them to follow him as the frightened refugees fled the temple. Hundreds of them were marched out of town, surrounded by soldiers. Shots heard were assumed to be the Germans "eliminating" those

who were unable to walk. At last, they reached a farm. Men were directed to one side, and women and children to the other. They were told it was merely for the night, but in the morning, the men were gone. In response to Sara's worried inquiries, the soldiers would only say the men had "gone to work." But that was the last time they saw their father.

After two days, the women and children were reassembled, locked into a small building, and left to wonder what the Germans had planned for them next. Barely able to breathe, the rumor circulated that they were to be burned. But they were released and marched to a valley. Machine guns pointed at the women and children from the hillsides.

Yet the miracle of their survival from this brush with war was announced by a German soldier: "Attention! You are free, but you must leave here. You must go away from here, toward Pultusk." A higher ranking official had arrived and ordered the soldiers to release their prisoners.

Marching once again, this time toward home, Sara Katz once again used the German she had learned from growing up in a border village to ask after her husband. She was told he would be found in Pultusk, when they reached home. Upon arrival at their apartment, 14 Pjotra Skarga, the children raced up the stairs, elated at the prospect of finding their father again. Emptiness. Their apartment was untouched, exactly as they had left it, but their father was not there. He never came.

Sara was left with the bleak future of supporting her seven children alone. Scavenging appeared the most promising option, as many Jews had left stores when they abandoned town, but most food was gone. A found sack of cereal provided security for a brief time, but soon the children had to range further from home to find food, traveling into the country to pick fruit, risking dangerous encounters with capricious and harsh German occupiers.

Three weeks after his family's return, on Sukkot, the Jews were expelled from Pultusk. First they were all gathered together in the town square, and then marched toward the town park. Soldiers resisted Sara's crying and begging to be allowed back to their apartment to get clothing or food.

Each fleeing citizen of Pultusk was sent through a small building where they were searched for valuables. Jewish belongings gradually filled the buckets along the walls, soon joined by the Katz money and valuables. Even Sara's wedding ring was taken.

Once through the checkpoint, they were driven across the River Narew. A soldier pointed down the road. East was where their hope lay, where the Russians were friendlier. For weeks, the Katz family walked. Too young to know, really, what was happening around him, Wilfred put his absolute trust in his mother, and it left no room for fear. They walked. Mr. Kay remembers knocking on doors at night, looking for shelter or food from friendly farmers.

After nearly a month, they reached the border where Russian occupation of Poland began. The border was closed. Sara, ever resourceful and skilled at saving her family, paid a local farmer to row the eight of them across the border river. It took two boats, but they arrived. In the distance they saw a town across a vast meadow. As they slowly walked towards this promise of security, a shape came towards them fast. It turned into a Russian soldier on a horse, commanding them to go back. They were rowed back under his watchful eye, in shock at this unexpected failure. It was a devastating blow.

Unwilling to give up, Sara guided her children to the one place rumor claimed the border was open. But it was closed. Russian soldiers feared spies lurked among the desperate Jewish refugees massing before the checkpoint. Sara tirelessly negotiated with the guards, eventually convincing them that no spies were hidden in her family, only weary children who were beginning to grow cold in the October air. As the Katz family went through, other refugees followed, surging through the gates. Panicked, the soldiers shot into the air, sending everyone back. Later, and only after great persistence, Sara and her children were let through under cover of darkness.

They walked. A stroke of kindness let them into the first house of the first village they came to that night, but there was no real room for them. Seeking more permanent security, Sara took her family by freight train to Grodno and eventually Lyachowici, a small town in Belarus. In a town of about 5000 people, one farmer was commanded by the authorities to house the desperate Katz family. The small room they came to call home was a true blessing for them.

Sara found a job sorting produce to support her family, but when she fell sick, there was no one to help, and her only option was to put her children into an orphanage. She resisted, but her illness persisted. The youngest, Benjamin and Rachel, were the first to leave. Both were sent to Grodno, the closest orphanage, but when Rachel grew too old, at age five, she was sent to another orphanage in Bialystok. As Sara's health worsened, she was forced to give up three more. Sima, Lea, and Wilfred were sent to an orphanage in Berezchno, near Mir in Belarus. It was a small village, but it was wonderful. They were well fed and well treated, but they were plagued by guilt, wondering how the rest of their family fared. They heard Shymon, the second eldest, had decided on his own to leave home and go to Grodno, where he could go to school for free.

In May of 1941, Wilfred and another girl were rewarded for their good work in school at the orphanage with a trip to a four week summer camp during the month of June. The camp was named Naroch for the lake it was situated next to, and it was paradise for these children, who came from all over Belarus. It was a place whose regulations offered a welcome relief from the chaos at home. There, Wilfred had no Jewish identity; he was just another lucky child. The children all hunted for mushrooms, played games, and sang, but the war intruded on June 22, when the Germans invaded the USSR. The camp staff persuaded the military authorities that the safety of their charges was of the utmost importance, and the staff and their hundreds of children were put on a freight train heading east. Germans planes fired at the trains, but there were, miraculously, no casualties. Many of the campers were dropped off near their homes, but

the remaining children had nowhere to go. They came to a village, some 300 miles southeast of Moscow, near the town of Ruzayevka, in the region of Mordovia.

A building was transformed into an orphanage for these children, where they were sheltered, fed, and educated until the age of 14, when their work was needed at a nearby factory. Due to the friendship of a wonderful teacher at the orphanage named Anna, Wilfred (by this time called Shura or Sasha, names he had been given during his time at the orphanage) had his call to factory duty deferred until he was 14 and a half. When he finally went to the factory, it was a cruel shock to leave the sheltered environment of the orphanage. His belongings were stolen within days, and his disappointment with his situation revealed itself in his letters to Anna, who at this time had returned to her hometown of Sumy in Ukraine. In 1944, after two weeks of hitching rides on trains and a frightening brush with the authorities of Ukraine, Wilfred made it to Sumy, by Anna's invitation. There, Anna warned him of strong anti-Semitism, and procured papers for him with the name Katzoff, a less Jewish-sounding name than his own, Katz. She did even more for the now Sasha Katzoff, getting him a factory job in nearby Achtyrka, and she became for him the closest thing he had to family. Another small miracle: the miracle of finding friendship and kindness given without asking.

But when the war ended, Wilfred's thoughts immediately turned to finding his true family, whom he had not seen for so many years. He made his way back to Lyachowici in 1945, the last place he had seen his mother. Wandering through the street, remembered and so familiar, he could not find the farm house that had provided his family with such welcome shelter in 1939. He finally realized that the empty lot on their street was the place he had been looking for. Seeing him staring at the lot, a girl from across the street came to him. She took him to the woman who had owned the destroyed farm house, Wilfred's old landlady, who was able to tell him what had become of his family.

The house, at least, had not been a victim of the war. It had burned down after. But in 1942, there had been two "actions". For the first, his family had hidden successfully. But they had been caught in the second. Wilfred heard the bleak story, so familiar, so feared. The Jews of Lyachowici had been seized in the second action and marched out to a nearby field outside of town. The mass graves were ready for their shot victims.

He was not surprised, though he had cherished hopes of their survival. His landlady did tell him, however, that his family, at the time of the actions, had consisted of his mother, his eldest brother Sholom, his older brother Shymon, and two more of Wilfred's siblings Shymon had brought back from orphanages with him upon returning from school in Grodno. That left two of Wilfred's siblings unaccounted for. The landlady had not known the rest of his siblings well enough to tell Wilfred which two.

As Wilfred's leave of absence from his factory in the USSR drew to a close, he found himself reluctant to leave the niche he had found for himself working and living side by side with his old landlady's family. He still wanted to see the field that served as

the final resting place for his family members, and to find his other two siblings. But the landlady introduced him to a fellow Jewish survivor, a Mr. Rabinowitz, who convinced him that there was nothing to see in that deadly field but grass, and that Wilfred should join him in traveling back to Poland, whose borders were now open to those who had been citizens before the war.

With false papers procured for him by Rabinowitz, Wilfred made it to Lodz, where the Jewish community had reassembled. At a loss for what to do, Wilfred was approached by a friendly young Jew who offered a place to stay: a kibbutz! Though the kibbutz wanted to help its members get to Palestine, Wilfred ended up going to a Displaced Persons camp in West Germany, in the town of Bad Reichenhall. He waited there for four years, but finally made it to the United States, the first choice of many as the “Golden Country”.

He arrived in Oakland in September of 1949. Struggling with the culture, the language, and even the new name of Wilfred Kay, he eventually was conscripted into the army, where he spent four months in training and was then assigned to duty in Germany. He met his wife, Rachel, dancing in the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. They purchased a fresh new home in Marin together, supported by Mr. Kay’s job as an engineer at PG&E, and raised a daughter.

Mr. Kay still hopes for more miracles. He has yet to find those two missing siblings. It is likely that they are Benjamin and Rachel, both young enough that they were more likely to be safe. In spite of advertisements and inquiries to city officials in Europe, it has proven impossible to find out what happened to these two mysterious siblings. Having heard his story, a story of miracles and survival, I think we can all believe in his chance of discovery.

Henry Libicki

By Nataly Man

The Spirit of the Jewish People Did Not Die!

As soon as I sat down with Henry Libicki he began his story with, “I’m not a typical survivor.” While reading this oral history, you will understand how Henry miraculously made it through this heartrending period of his life.

Henry was born in Klobuck, Poland just ten miles outside of Czestochowa. His parents, Yechezkel and Yochevet, had three other children besides him: Ester Chaya, Rachel, and Kopel.

When Henry was a child, he remembered going to a school where only 10-15% of the students were Jewish. It was normal for the young gentile kids to beat up the Jewish children simply because of their religion. Henry’s family observed the Sabbath, attended synagogue, kept Kosher, and observed the Jewish holidays. His father was a well-off wheat and flour wholesaler and his mother took care of the home and children.

In October 1942, the first selection, which is the time when the Nazis would decide whether a Jew would remain where they were or move to a camp, occurred. The Libickis, living in the Big Czestochowa ghetto at the time, were able to avoid the selection because they owned a bakery in a time when bakers were needed. Although bakers were needed, they knew that not everyone in their family could avoid the selection. His brother was strong and fit, almost confident that he would pass; therefore, he went through the selection with his brother-in-law and passed. Those who did not pass this selection went to Treblinka, an extermination camp run by Nazis in Poland. In the Big Ghetto, life for Henry was almost normal. There were stores and the Libickis had their bakery. Gentiles, non-Jews, could come and go freely. Henry’s family was lucky to have a very decent apartment. His father and other parents hired a teacher to teach their kids through their sixth and eighth years of school. Not everyone in the ghetto had been as well off as his family.

As his family continued to work as bakers, they felt suspicious. They knew something bad would happen to them because, sooner or later, the bakers would be liquidated. The bakers could not stay forever; after all, they were Jews. His family decided that they needed to get out of there. Henry’s brother-in-law was able to bribe the S.S. officers with eight \$20 gold pieces to take them to the other ghetto called the Small Czestochowa ghetto. Two days later the S.S. soldiers, the Nazis, captured the rest of the bakers and shot them, sending them straight to the cemetery.

Life in the Small Ghetto was much more difficult. It was a much more depressed environment; there were no stores, and no gentiles could come in. There was a small kitchen that fed 6,000 Jews very disgusting food, usually consisting of some sort of soup,

“if you could call it that.” Yet, as Henry said, “we ate anything to survive.” Henry lived in an apartment of two tiny rooms with a total of 150 square feet along with eight other people. Each day they made it their goal to work and stay busy, demonstrating to the Nazis that they would not falter under German oppression.

On January 3, 1943, the Germans found out there were two Jewish partisans in the ghetto who were trying to get money, ammunition and guns. All of the Jews were rounded up the following day and forced to stand in a square. “We were standing like geese.” Henry was one of the few standing on the edge of the group. Right next to him was a Jewish partisan who pulled out a gun and attempted to shoot the officer, but unfortunately was not able to because something was wrong with the gun. The officer immediately shot the partisan who stood by Henry’s side. Henry remembers the sight of him quivering, as he died from the bullets. It was the first time that he had witnessed someone’s death.

Soon after that, the officers called many names - among them was Henry’s brother-in-law. After they all lined up, they shot 25 of them randomly. His brother-in-law was taken out with 24 others and executed in front of everyone. An additional few hundred names of Jews were announced including Henry Libicki, Yochevet Libicki, and Yechezkel Libicki. Anyone whose name was called was destined to Treblinka two days later. Immediately, Henry’s sister and brother-in-law intervened and requested the Libickis for work. Two days later, the officers called 20 names before sending the Jews off, which included Yochevet and Yechezkel. Henry’s name was not called, which meant that he was to be sent to Treblinka. As his parents went in their appointed direction, Henry knew that he had to take a risk to stick by their side. A Nazi stopped and asked him for his name. He responded “Libicki!” and the S.S. officer let him continue behind his parents.

After he escaped from being sent to Treblinka, he continued his life at the Small Ghetto. The following morning Henry went to HASAG (Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft), a labor camp 5 kilometers outside of the ghetto. S.S. officers surrounded the group of people who went to the camp daily to ensure that no one would escape. Going to the HASAG labor camp was the only way of exiting the ghetto. The type of work Henry did at the camp included “Honey Dipping,” the emptying of latrines. “It was a big pit, dirty and filthy. We would empty it when it is full, 3-4 people. We emptied it with a wagon.”

Every day, Henry walked five kilometers to the camp. One day, Henry and the rest of the group were told that they could not leave HASAG; he couldn’t return to the Small Czystochowa ghetto. He stayed there with his family until January 1945. The S.S. officers treated everyone terribly. Henry remembers one experience where an S.S. officer beat him very violently with a rifle simply because Henry had cookies.

On June 15, news broke that the Russians were coming to save them. All of the S.S. officers fled leaving everything behind. The next day, the 16th, at around 11pm, young people went to see if it was true, only to find an empty guardhouse. They realized

that all the officers had left. Everyone grabbed rifles and Henry remembers someone yelling, "JEWS, WE ARE FREE!" On his way past what Henry called the "Gates to Freedom," he saw the same S.S. officer that beat him with the rifle unarmed. If he wanted, Henry could have killed him. He decided to kick the officer and ran off, leaving him behind.

Henry told me the story of how a boy reacted to him not choosing to kill the Nazi who had brutally hurt him. His simple answer was, "I could not kill a guy, I am not a murderer."

Almost Henry's entire family was able to walk through the "Gates of Freedom." The handsome, strong and fit brother, Kopel, was sent to Germany a day and a half before the Russians came and died in a long-distance march under extremely harsh conditions. Although Kopel was killed, Henry still considers himself lucky when compared to others. "I had the support of the family. Ninety percent of the survivors had no one left."

Once freed, Henry's father was able to get hold of German papers. Through trains, similar to those which had brought Jews to Treblinka, his family arrived at the English zone of Germany and then moved to the American zone. After arriving to the American zone in Germany, Henry met his future wife, who moved to the United States. Three and a half years later, Henry was able to move to the United States, and the two were married a few months later. They have lived in the United States ever since.

Now he is a husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He tells his family every Passover the story of his "Exodus" from the oppression. With his optimistic smile, an important lesson that he teaches the world is the fact that, "The spirit of the Jewish people did not die."

Opening the Dusty Windows of History

Carrying only a thick, bound copy of "The History of the World", R embarked on the beginning of her own history. The date was Sunday, the 3rd of September 1939, and the history of the world was about to be marked by the atrocities of World War II. Knowing that she and her family were likely to be targets of the new waves of anti-Semitism sweeping Poland with the arrival of German forces, R fled, walking alongside her father and six brothers and sisters to a nearby town called Sosnowiec.

R's previous life in Katowice was peacefully blissful. The Jewish and gentile populations in Katowice were entirely integrated, as it was not until high school that she became friends with other Jewish youth. In her apartment complex, she grew up playing with children regardless of religious identity.

Her family attended the local synagogue, Mickiewicza, and fervently celebrated all Jewish holidays. They were free to practice to whatever extent they wished. R and her brothers and sisters gained knowledge of Jewish studies in the local school in order to fulfill the religion requirement mandated by the Polish Catholic government. While at school R was most interested in History, design and art. Following high school, she hoped to attend art school.

With German occupation in Katowice, the peaceful atmosphere characterizing R's youth fragmented and fell before her. One evening she her mother sent her to the apartment of a close family friend, a bookkeeper, only to find the door firmly closed and locked with a sign stating, "Here we are using the German greetings, 'Heil Hitler'". R declined the greeting and never saw the family again.

After the war began on September 1st 1939, R's family grew worried and decided to flee to a nearby town called Sosnowiec with other Jews from their town. Those in Katowice were worried that the German army would control and explode the mines, destroying the city. Sosnowiec was thought to be safer because the industry was not based upon coal as it was in Katowice.

Unfortunately, upon arrival in Sosnowiec, R's family found the situation to be worse than in Katowice. German forces entered Sosnowiec on the same day as Katowice, September 4th 1939, but the situation was worse because Polish gentiles were telling the Nazis who was and was not Jewish. The Nazis then reacted violently towards the Jews. R remembers the situation as horrifying and chaotic, and says that her family desperately missed home. Instead of enduring the atrocities in Sosnowiec they returned to their apartment in Katowice.

At home the German response to the Jews intensified, as Katowice also fell under German occupation. Shortly following the declaration of war, the Nazis rounded up all Jewish men from Katowice, including R's three brothers and her father. With her father and brothers gone, R, at 19, became the primary breadwinner for her family. In May of 1940, the Germans forced R, her mother, and her sisters to leave Katowice and move to Sosnowiec.

One evening, following an exhausting day of work at a cigarette manufacturer in Sosnowiec, R's uncle, who worked for the Jewish Community Center, told R that it was dangerous to return home. Her uncle heard that the German Police were seeking young Jewish women to export to factories throughout Eastern Europe. Instead of returning home that evening, R stayed at her aunt's apartment. When the German soldiers arrived, her name was not on the list under her aunt's address, so the Nazis left the household and R remained temporarily safe.

A few hours later, two German soldiers arrived with orders to arrest R. Carrying only a suitcase with articles of clothing for each of Poland's distinct four seasons, R boarded a train to Czechoslovakia. After stopping at a school, where doctors questioned her health, soldiers sent R to Etrich, a flax-harvesting factory in Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia.

Sitting in her carriage, R worried for the fate of her mother and three younger sisters. As the train clacked along the tracks, and her stomach rumbled from hunger, she awaited her new life at the factory in Sudetenland.

Situated in the majestic mountains of Czechoslovakia, Etrich seemed out of place. The building itself was giant and rectangular with huge windows covering many of the walls. The windows, and everything else inside the building was lined with a thick grey dust, a byproduct of the flax-harvesting process. Through the dust one could see blooming flowers and fields, characterizing the natural beauty of the world outside the encampment of Etrich.

Standing inside the barracks, R and 40 other women were assigned to their various factory jobs. Because R appeared stronger than many of the others, the officials assigned her to the barn. The farmers brought bundles of flax to the barn each day, and with the help of a few other girls, R stacked the flax until it was approximately two stories high.

Although she had to work for eight to ten hours per day and was physically exhausted by the process, the benefit of the job was that the foremen found the barn too frigid to supervise, so R and her co-workers were left to their own devices. While working in the barn one of the weaker girls discovered that flaxseeds were a good supplement to their meager diets. Because the girls were un-supervised, they began eating the flaxseeds in order to maintain strength.

Despite her sparse diet, R forfeited her ration of bread to sustain younger and weaker girls in the factory. R maintained strength because she remained hopeful and never allowed herself to think that she wouldn't survive. She firmly believed that such an outlook was essential to survival, as she describes one girl who was not as optimistic. Upon arrival, the girl told R that she didn't think she would survive. Because of her pessimistic perspective, the girl had a nervous breakdown and was sent to Auschwitz.

While in the camp R maintained hope through her censored view of the outside world. Her mother rarely wrote letters concerning how life really was and instead assured her that the family was safe. Because letters were censored her mother used codes to unveil details that the Nazis would not approve of.

R did not know what happened to her mother and sisters during the war until she received a package in May 1943. At first the package confused R, as it contained torn stockings and items belonging to her mother and sisters. Because of the items R instinctively knew that something was wrong and guessed that they were deported to Auschwitz.

During the spring of 1945, those in Etrich became increasingly hopeful that the war would soon come to an end and Russian, French and English soldiers would liberate them. On one particularly sunny spring day, the factory shook as Russian planes flew low overhead. Everyone flung the dusty windows open and leaned outward in order to smile and wave at the Russian soldiers, hoping desperately for an imminent defeat for the Germans.

On May 8th 1945, R awoke to find herself liberated. Overnight, the guards and commandants of Etrich vanished, as the Russians finally defeated the Germans, and the women of the factory were free. R ran with hundreds of other female factory workers to the road outside Etrich, where the Russian army jubilantly celebrated victory. The soldiers danced in the fresh spring air to the euphoric tunes of the accordion. They hoisted a Russian Doctor from Etrich atop a tank so that she could join in the triumph.

After a few days, R and friends from Etrich used free train passes to travel to Prague. Upon arrival in Prague, a man noted their ragged appearance and Jewish stars and offered a feast of delicious Czech food and dumplings. He suggested that the women rest at a hotel where they would be allowed to stay for free. After living in a hotel room for a while, R had to move out, as the room was needed for British war prisoners. R then found warm welcoming by nuns in a local convent. Eventually R decided to return to Katowice in hope that she would be able to re-unite with family members.

Although the war was over, Katowice remained in a state of chaos. In the train station, there was barely enough room to stand on two feet, as materials were scarce throughout Poland, and one may have to travel to a major city many miles away in order to obtain a necessity as simple as a box of matches. The train station was therefore packed with people desperately seeking basic commodities.

Katowice itself was not the same city. R says, "It [Katowice] was a jewel before the war, but nothing was done to maintain the heart of the city".

Because of her disappointment regarding the neglect in Katowice, after only a few days, R decided to return to Prague. As she approached the train station, she passed a home of one of her family friends from before the war. While peering through the window, R realized that she recognized the man inside the house. Without much thought she knocked on the door, and told the man that she was returning to Prague. This one action proved essential to her re-unification with her father. When her father returned to Katowice, he met with same man who told him that R was safely living in Prague. Her father then sent a relative to Prague with a message for R. The relative looked up R's address while in Prague and told her that her father was in Katowice. R returned to meet her father in Katowice where he told her how he and her three brothers spent the war.

R learned that shortly after the Nazis rounded up her father and brothers, they were released because the Germans were unorganized and did not have the means to control and house the men. Her father and brothers were then able to cross into the Russian occupied part of Poland and survived the war in Russia. Her father and youngest brother volunteered for the Polish army.

Following the war, two of her brothers and her sister moved to Israel, while another brother moved to Denmark. R married and decided to move to Berlin, as the rampant anti-Semitism in Poland led her to believe that there was no future for her in Katowice. In 1951, R and her husband moved to America, as they were allowed a resident's visa through the Displaced Person's Act.

Today, R's comfortable home in San Rafael, California remains a tribute to her own history. She keeps photographs, maps and brochures in boxes beside her couch, as a reminder of what has marked her life. As she shows pictures of Katowice before the war, I realize that R doesn't look upon her history in a dismal light, but keeps her memories of joy and hope close at hand. R has written her own history through a lens of optimism and vitality. She carries this history with pride, through her solid posture and sparkling eyes.

Tightening of the Screws

This is a story of a survivor, a man who overcame incredible hardship to thrive and stay alive. During his struggle and thereafter, he kept his Jewish faith, heritage and most importantly, his humanity. It is an honor and a necessity that I tell the story of Irving Zale.

Irving Zale was born in Cologne, Germany in 1926. He was born to his mother Francиска and his father Jacob. Jacob was a journeyman and Francиска was a homemaker. They did not live in a Jewish neighborhood, yet they adhered to their religious views. Irving had a Bar-Mitzvah in Cologne where thirty of his close family and friends attended. He belonged to Habonim, a Jewish youth group and to the local Jewish Community Center. Irving's most endearing and powerful memory of his early childhood in Cologne was the fantastic annual Carnival that would come to the city on the 11th day in November, culminating the week long festival leading up to Ash Wednesday. Irving loved the pageantry and joy of the Carnival.

During his early childhood in Cologne, Irving felt anti-Semitism grip Germany. He was mercilessly teased and bullied in school. Irving and his family were aware of the rise in Nazism and the hatred of Jews that was strangling Germany. He listened to Adolf Hitler's fiery speeches and saw increasingly large numbers of Nazi flags. In 1936 Irving's mother took him to visit relatives in Krakow. During this year the Olympic Games were taking place in Berlin. Irving was captivated by the drama and prowess of American runner Jesse Owens. How could Jesse Owens's race be inferior: if Jesse beats the best Aryan runners in the world? He begged his mother to let him go see the games in Berlin, but fearing for his safety, she declined.

Sensing the rising hatred and danger of life in Cologne, Irving Zale and his family moved east to the large Polish city of Krakow to live with other family members. The war was on everyone's mind. It was not a matter of if the Germans were going to strike at Poland, but when.

The war caught up with Irving and his family on September 1, 1939 when the German army invaded Poland. Responding to the attack, Irving and his mother fled east towards the Soviet Union. His father was in Warsaw at the time. Unfamiliar with the country side and not used to long marching, Irving and his mother were caught by German soldiers on September 13. They were returned to Krakow on the 16th of December, 1939.

Irving's father returned to Krakow on the 19th of September 1939 when Irving was 13 years old. By mid-October 1939 Irving and his family were forced to move out of

their apartment and into the crowded inner city of Krakow. During this time the German authorities initiated the official requirement of Jewish identification arm bands.

In the early months of 1940 Irving Zale's father joined the Krakow Ordnungsdienst, a Jewish police force that was run by the Nazi's in order to keep the Jews docile and under control. His father quickly realized the ugly truth and left the group. During the winter of 1940 Irving and his family suffered severe winter weather conditions.

In January 1941, Irving and his family were forcibly moved to a small village called Zielonek. There they lived a extremely tranquel rural life, seemingly millions of years removed form the terror and filth of the war. The village gave Irving a false sense of security. The Nazi's were slowly tightening the screws.

On April 10th, 1942 Irving and his father were forced to work at a local quarry making bricks. The men and the women were separeted and his mother went into hiding. The next time Irving saw his mother was on August 22nd when he suffered from yellow jaundice. She came out of hiding to care for him. His mother had been hiding in the town of Skawina, but was captured and returned to the quarry.

The quarry closed and forced labor ended. Irving and his family were sent to Plaszow labor camp. This camp was infamous for the atrocities of the Nazi's, and the heroics of Oscar Schindler. The camp was shown in Steven Spielberg's famous movie, "Schindler's List." In November a new Nazi commander arrived at the camp. His name was Goeth, and once he took charge, the camp developed into a concentration camp.

On November 16, 1942, at age 16, Irving was moved from Plaszow work camp to what was to be known as HASAG I, a to-be developed ammunicions factory in Czestochowa in the industrial region of Silesia. That was the day Irving saw his parents for the last time. There, a man named Herr Jolles, a good friend of Irving's father, saw him and took care of him, or so it seemed. Herr Jolles became a camp organizer for the Nazi's, who believed that if he worked with them he could save his own skin.

On November 18, 1943, the old textile factory was reclaimed by a German company and was converted into a munitions factory. It was surrounded by a German company, not by the SS, or German army. It was covered in barbed wire and the Jews were imprisoned in the camp working long hours. It was patrolled and defended by the hated "Black Russians," Ukrainian mercenaries hired to control the Jews. Irving's father's good friend Herr Jolles had a position overseeing all of the Jewish laborers.

At the camp Irving met up with Robert Saherl. He was from Slovakia and took Irving under his wing. Jolles completely ignored Irving and did not respect his fellow Jews. The only thing that Jolles did for Irving was give him a "soft job," or a job that did not require backbreaking manual labor.

By the winter of 1943 Irving was only being given a tiny ration of watered down soup and moldy bread. Being a prisoner was a humiliating experience and he felt completely vulnerable to exploitation. A particularly humiliating experience was a day in winter when all of the Jewish laborers were marched through the town to the jeers of the Polish civilians to be deloused and cleaned.

In 1944 the camp was humming at full productivity. Lots of new forced laborers arrived and also local Polish men were paid tiny wages to work in the plant. These Polish laborers gave the Jews news from the outside. The year passed as the one before, with hard labor and rough conditions. Something was different though, and by December tension started to grow. The war was coming closer to Czestochowa.

Terrifying news came in early 1945. Over 800 men were rumored to be shipped back to Germany, most likely to a horrific fate at a death camp. The infamous Auschwitz death camp was only 40 miles away. On January 15, 1945, as the transports were being readied, news flooded into the factory that the Red army was advancing ever closer! That day the German business owners, Ukrainian mercenaries, and German lackey Herr Jolles, fled west towards Germany. A group of Jewish laborers went throughout the factory warning the Jews not to leave yet and to stay diligent.

On January 17, 1945 bombing and artillery fire boomed overhead as the Red army advanced into the town and the vital industrial area of Silesia. At about 8:00 A.M. Irving saw the first column of massive Russian T-34 Tanks roll past the factory. After five and a half years of imprisonment and fear, freedom was finally near.

Faced with starvation, since the fleeing Germans and Ukrainians took all of the remaining supplies with them, Irving joined his Jewish laborers and went into the town to forage for food and other supplies. The city was devastated with broken equipment and dead bodies lying in and along the streets.

On January 18 the Soviet army left the town and told the Jews to “stay in the camp” in order to survive. Irving stayed a few weeks until he ventured out and moved east. It was not until February 12 that he was reunited with his surviving family. He joined with his aunt Lotka and his uncle Zygmunt after spending almost a month looking for them among the throng of refugees and soldiers. By then Irving was 18.

After contacting his mother’s brother, who was in the United States, Irving was able to immigrate to New York City and start a new life in America. He never knew exactly what happened to his parents and other relatives. The Red Cross reported years later that his father perished in Matthaussen, and his mother passed away in Bergin-Belsen five days after the war.

Irving Zale’s story is not just an incredible feat of survival, but an absolutely vital history lesson. His story must be preserved and repeated to future generations to show the danger of hate and ignorance. It is a lesson in humanity that we must always be aware of

the hate that can grow in society and never allow something as horrific as the Holocaust to happen again.

Assemblymember Dave Jones
District 9



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Ilse Spivek

Interviewed by Mikayla Sibner

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Israel

Ilse Spivek

By Mikayla Sibner

Mazal (Luck)

Luck: an unknown and unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another. For Ilse Spivek, looking back on the horrible events of the Holocaust in Germany, she finds that her story was defined by luck and that her life has been filled with blessings.

Ilse Spivek was born on March 5, 1922 in what, after WWII, became known as East Berlin. Her first bit of luck was that, as a young girl, she led a privileged life in which she, in her own words, was a “spoiled princess.” She was an only child with a very successful attorney father and a social stay at home mother. Her family was not particularly observant Jews, but they celebrated most of the holidays. Her parents both came from Orthodox homes with very little money, but as Hitler took power in Germany they found themselves well-off and became part of Reform Judaism.

Ilse was thirteen when Hitler began his campaign against the Jews. At first, the German government forced her to carry an identification card with her picture, birthday, address, and other recognition factors that identified her as a Jew. If she was caught without it, the consequences were steep. She remembers when German soldiers would march by, she and the other Jews would duck behind doorways, for fear that if she did not “heil Hitler” she would not be considered a “good German” and if she did, she was afraid of being accused of mocking the troops.

The discrimination continued when she and the other Jewish children were thrown out of German public schools. Most of them joined private Jewish schools, ones that were not prepared to accept so many students, but some of the well-off parents imported British schools and British teachers to come and teach in Berlin. Ilse went to one of the imported schools. Her only problem with the British schools was that they taught everything in English, and seeing as English was a second language to them, they had some trouble. Ilse hated math because she was not very good at it, and she joked, “I didn’t understand math in German, how will I understand it in another language?!” The fact that they taught in English was lucky, for it would eventually help her when she moved to the United States.

Also during this time, the Jews were not allowed to go to restaurants, movies, or even use public transportation. Ilse told a story about how she and a friend went to a restricted restaurant. They felt so bad that they could not even eat what they had ordered. They told their parents what they had done; their parents were forgiving, but let them know how much in danger they not only put themselves, but their family as well. They were lucky they had not been caught.

It was not until one dreadful night that Ilse's parents decided that it was time to leave Germany. On the night of November 9th, 1938 – the night that became known as Kristallnacht – Ilse and her mother were at home alone when Nazis came to their door to arrest her father. Because a grateful client had tipped him off, her father had left the house to hide for a couple of days. He knew that the Nazis were coming for him and did not tell Ilse and her mother that he was leaving, knowing that even if they were taken into custody themselves, they really would not be able to tell where he was. Ilse and her mother were so scared, she even remembers how much her mother's legs shook from fear. After the Nazis left, Ilse and her mother left the apartment and went to her father's secretary's house who hid them for a couple of days. Luck was with her family again that night, for if her father had not been warned, he would have been shipped off to a concentration camp and, because of what happened, the family decided they had to leave Germany.

When the decision was made that they had to leave Germany, Ilse's parents knew that someone in the family would need to make money in whichever country they went. Because of this they pulled Ilse out of school and put her into an apprenticeship with a professional photographer. She started out touching up photographs and eventually learned the business of photography. Ilse had always been drawn to artistic things. When her parents sent her to learn photography, she found her niche. She was lucky again for it became her passion and later it would become her profession.

People had started emigrating from Germany early on, but by the time Ilse and her family decided to go it was getting harder to get out of the country and get a visa into another country. When they first tried to get visas it was impossible, but luck played a card. Ilse had an uncle who had immigrated to the U.S. far before the war started. He had settled in Kansas City, Missouri and owned a drugstore. The lucky thing about this drugstore was that it was down the street from Harry Truman's store. He knew him casually and when he learned that they were trying to acquire visas, he wrote to newly elected Senator Truman, who then intervened to get visas for Ilse, her parents, and some other relatives of hers. However, the United States would not provide visas for her grandmothers because they were considered too old and would not have been able to contribute to society in the United States. They were forced to stay behind. One grandmother died of natural causes after the family had left. The other grandmother was eventually sent by the Nazis to Auschwitz where she perished, along with Ilse's aunt.

On September 1, 1939, Ilse and her family left Germany for the United States, the very day that Hitler marched into Western Poland. Luck was with them even then, for life became harder for the Jews.

Ilse and her family came to the United States. They had been able to avoid the evils that the Holocaust had inflicted on so many. Ilse was able to find work with a photographer and went back to school. Her father worked for a trucking company for he was not able to practice law in the U.S. They became U.S. citizens. Ilse went on to attend the Bauhaus, an art school, in Chicago and became a head photographer for a big studio.

Her father, through another stroke of luck, found a job with Florsheim Shoes and rose to the position of Vice President.

The horrors of the Holocaust had touched their lives. But Ilse remembers the good fortune and luck that followed her throughout that experience, and for the rest of her life. It was only recently in life that she chose to tell her story. But as she looks back she knows that luck was with her and her fate was so much better than so many others.

Assemblymember Betty Karnette
District 54



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Lilly Black

Interviewed by Makenzie Gomez

Acknowledgements

Gerda Seifer, Holocaust survivor and resident of Long Beach

Janet Pottebaum, Jewish Family and Children's Services

Lilly Black

By Makenzie Gomez

Livia Wiess was born on August 16, 1930 in Satu-Mare, Romania. She lived in an average religious household, with an average Jewish family consisting of her mother, father, sister, and brother. Her father went to the temple every Friday and Saturday, and occasionally attended during the week. She had many relatives that lived in the same town as her immediate family. Livia's parents ran what she calls a nut factory, where they took the nuts that were perfectly cut in half, and boxed them to be sold. Satu-Mare was on the border of Hungary, and in 1940 it was occupied by Hungarians. The leader of Hungary, being "very cozy" with Hitler, took instruction to take over this area for him. Livia was no longer allowed to go to Romanian schools, but she had a tutor who taught her math at her house. She handled this well and never gave her parents any trouble. She was a good girl.

In Europe parents didn't really tell their children what was happening, so Livia was unaware of what was going on outside her basic routine. In 1943, on a Sunday, her mother and aunts started to cook immensely. Finally, curiosity took over and she asked what all this food was for. Her mother responded, "You'll see." Livia went with the women to the railroad station, about half a mile away from her home, to take the food to its destination. A plethora of people were there, loading ample food into the train. She had no idea where these people were going or what they were doing. She was thirteen years old. She would later learn that the train carried Jewish prisoners on their way to concentration camps.

In early 1944, Livia's family heard that the Germans were coming. She was scared, but was still not sure what was going on. The first thing the Jews in the community were told was to put yellow stars on all their clothing. From one day to the next, the German soldiers came to the houses, and one day they told *her* family they had to line up and go to a ghetto. Her mother told the family to get dressed and to take some of their clothes with them. Her mother also packed food because it was very close to Passover, and they couldn't eat bread. They walked from their house to this "area." Livia was very frightened. There were people sleeping on the floor and just not enough room for everyone. They only remained in this ghetto for three weeks. Then one day, the German soldiers told the Jews to line up. They were going to the railroad station. "The worst part is my parents just went," says Lily as she recollects the events, "They did exactly what they were told." They all had to walk, young or old, with a bag of clothes, ending up at the railroad station by her house. Cattle cars came into view, and the Germans yelled the German equivalent to "fast" or "hurry". Her mother accidentally stumbled, and a German soldier hit her. That was the first time Livia ever saw violence.

There were 50 or 60 people crammed in this small cattle car, with only the food that was strategically brought. They did the best they could. The train started to leave, and that was that. The women distributed everything, and they ate. When night came

children cried, but Livia still had no idea where they were going. When the day came, she tried looking over the bars while someone else was knocking on the door begging for more water. As usual, the Germans didn't listen. One very early morning, the train stopped abruptly. The doors opened at Auschwitz- Birkenau, a concentration camp that had a banner that read, "Arbeit Macht Frie", German translation for "work will free you." German soldiers yelled, "fast" and "hurry". Everyone had to disembark immediately. Livia saw people in striped clothing, who were the Polish Jews that had already been there since 1939 or 1940. Those men were told to take their bundles, when a Polish Jew came close to her and said, "Eat everything." She didn't know why he said that, but she listened and said nothing in return. The Nazi soldiers separated the group from left to right. Livia's parents and brother were told to go to the right, while she and her sister were told to go to the left. Not one person made a fuss. They were just like cattle. They did what they were told.

They were lined up when one of the German officers, Officer Mengele, asked Livia how old she was. Something in her mind was saying *this stirs trouble*. She confidently responded, "I am twenty-one." He said, "You are lying... But go over there." Her sister followed, and they went into the unpaved street with all the other young people. Surrounding the area was an electric fence. They were sent into one room where their hair was cut off. In the next room they were told to take their clothes off. Livia felt very uncomfortable because she had never taken her clothes off in front of anybody. She knew she could not refuse. She dropped her clothes and was given some sort of rag clothing and wooden shoes. These women walked until they got to a certain number of barracks in the concentration camp. On tri-level bunk beds made of planks of wood, each person got one blanket. Livia had not eaten for over two days. There was no water. Close to the evening, the same Polish Jewish men that greeted them at the front gate arrived with the food of the day: bread the size of the palm of a hand, and maybe a little margarine. They went to bed. She was frightened. She cried all night.

At around five thirty in the morning, the Capo (German word for the Jewish head of a barrack), blew her whistle, and the women lined up, five to a row. Livia's row included her sister, two other sisters, one other girl, and herself. They stood for a long time until the same people from the night before brought them tea. Tea was going to be their breakfast for the rest of their time at Birkenau. Although disgusting, Livia ate what she was told, always remembering what the man said when she got out of the cattle car. They had to stand for hours, then for lunch they were given soup in which contents were difficult to decipher. They continued to stand until the whistle was blown, and were taken to a barrack with water faucets lined up. With the amount of people, you had to run to get water, because the faucets shut off after a certain amount of time. No one was allowed to be near the electric fence and if you did break this rule, everyone suffered the consequences. Later in the day, they stood in line again. "My life was hunger, thirst, and fear. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what they wanted. I didn't know what to do." said Livia. She often wondered where God was in times like these.

Around the fifth day, "selection" happened. Everyone had to scramble to find a place to stand and hope you did not get picked. If you were picked, nobody would ever

see you again. One of the two other sisters in her group was chosen. After a week, Livia got a terrible tooth ache. She knew not to tell the Germans anything, because this would be a good reason to be "selected." The Capo took her to a small room and pulled her tooth without any anesthesia. She missed her parents. She had never been away from them this long. Livia said, "I miss my parents. Where are they? I haven't seen them for a long time." The Capo said, "You want to know where they are?" She pointed out the window to some flames behind her barracks and said, "That's where they are." At the camp nobody talked to each other, so she couldn't ask anyone what the flame meant. Over time, she realized that terrible things were happening over in Auschwitz. The only thing she and her sister could worry about was the selections. During the day, their job was to break large stones into small stones. They had lunch, and had to stand in line again. In the third week, a Jewish prisoner touched the fence and Livia witnessed that person hanged. There were many more hangings, but she only witnessed this one. Every day, the men in striped uniforms brought the food. Livia then understood what the man had meant by, "Eat everything." He meant that even if the soup was not preferable, you needed to eat it to survive. So she did.

It was now the fall of 1944. One morning, a German civilian came to her concentration camp to recruit 200 women to work in his factory back in Germany. Instead of standing in rows of five like they were used to, they were told to stand in rows of ten. Her sister was put in another row. If the Germans noticed you looked like your sister, they separated you. Her sister was the only family she had at this point. When they began to count they cut off two rows. Livia's sister, who was in one of those rows, was sent to a small room along with the others in that group. After seeing Livia's sister hauled away, the girl next to Livia, said, "You know your sister is gone." But Livia's sister was brave. She told the German officer how strong she was and how good she could work. Just then, a German officer entered that small room with instructions to send back five women because they had miscounted the 200 necessary and had only 195. Livia's sister was sent back to the original work group with Livia. This group of 200 women had never received tattoos, because it was too late in the war, and they were originally planned to be killed. They now walked back to the station and got into the cattle cars. By this point, Livia's sister is nearly hysterical because she realized she had survived. They knew what was going on. As they leave, they never saw any of their other family again. They realized then, that they had been killed. Livia finds her and her sister on the train headed for an ammunition factory in a city in Germany. There is food on the train for them. For the first time, they see German SS (German military) women and their dogs.

It was now Christmas Eve, and they were being treated a bit better. They are given good soup, and even given a piece of candy that day. All was well until the German officers came in and pointed to spit on the ground. They asked the women to confess if they had done it. They had all been sleeping, so no one confessed. It was Christmas day. The German officers belted each woman 25 times. At this point, the women were weak and felt destroyed. The scars and bruises were visible for many years after the beating. They went back to camp and worked for a few days. The allies were getting closer, so they were sent to a different camp by train. Every time they went to another camp they

had less food. Eventually, Livia was in a camp with no food, and only some water. It was February or March of 1945. Looking over the fence, there were prisoners from Italy. "I always hoped that I would be saved, and never thought I would be killed," said Livia, "I don't know how that works. It just does when you are young." Suddenly, the American army, traveling in tanks, arrived at the gate. They got out and opened the gates. The Americans came forward and said, "You are free." Livia was finally liberated and was then taken to a displaced persons camp. They ended up in a place called Bergen-Belsen. It was used as a concentration camp, but it was also a death camp. There were dead people on the ground. One of the American officers named Dwight Eisenhower (who later would become the U.S. President) ordered the German civilians to clean up the camp and remove the bodies before Livia and the other Jewish survivors could disembark. As soon as the camp was cleaned up, The Americans fed them breakfast, lunch and dinner. "To this day, I make sure there's always bread in the house."

One of the organizations that operated this displaced persons camp was based out of New York. This group helped displaced Jewish survivors immigrate to America. This was possible because President Harry Truman passed a House Resolution that stated if an immigrant was under 18 years of age, an American citizen could sponsor them. While this organization was helping Livia and her sister find a relative in New York, her sister met someone, got married and moved to Israel. It is now 1946. Livia, however, wanted the typical dream: to go to America. She remembered back home when her parents would talk about relatives in New York. They would say the streets were paved with gold. The organization finally finds a relative in New York, but he is not well in health. By the time they could send Livia to America, the man dies and her cousins in New York could not sponsor her. Livia finally finds a Rabbi to sponsor her and goes to New York by ship over the Atlantic Ocean. One morning, she wakes up and sees the Statue of Liberty. It was amazing for Livia. A train took them all the way to Los Angeles. She was about sixteen years old. "Coming to America was a dream come true."

When she arrives in America, she changes her name to Lilly. She attends Belmont High School to learn English. It's at Belmont High that she meets another Holocaust survivor named Ella. They become very good friends. She also gets a job at May Company. During this time, Lilly lives with a cousin and sleeps on the couch. She likes it there. However, a new opportunity is given to Lilly by her friend Ella. Ella asks Lilly to go with her to live in Long Beach with a couple who is willing to take both of them at Ella's request. They both move to Long Beach. She attends and graduates from Wilson High. Lilly introduces Ella to a friend who she falls in love with. Ella also introduces Lilly to her boyfriend's co-worker, Gabriel Black. Lilly and Gabe decided to marry when Ella and her boyfriend decided to marry. The couple that took care of Lilly and Ella help pay for both the weddings that they host in their backyard. They were the most giving people Lilly ever met.

Lilly and Ella are still very good friends and consider themselves sisters. Lilly says, "I don't know what you think. But, there is not one person who doesn't suffer. It doesn't matter if you're black, or brown or- you all have to have the same thing... In life,

for me, I don't see any difference. We are all the same... And my heart still hurts. But life is wonderful, and everyone deserves to Live.”

*Assemblymember Rick Keene
District 3*



*Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors*

Judith Kenedi

Interviewed by Ashleigh Allard

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California State University, Chico*

Judith Kenedi

By Ashleigh Allard

Remembering the Past Changes the Future

What's the first thought you think when you wake up in the morning? Is it "What will I wear? Do I really have to go to school today? Why does so and so have to be my lab partner?" Do you worry about bad hair, bad breath, or a bad sense of style? Do you care more about what people think about your clothes than your character? Today's teens are so caught up in the unnecessary demands of this world that they forget to stop and smile at the simple things in life. Most of us don't realize how good we have it. Sixty years ago life was completely different. Times have changed immensely and so have our priorities. But every now and then, each one of us should take the time to stop and consider what we have and then compare it to the generations behind us. People who lived before us lived without internet, television, email, malls, cell phones, cars, electricity, etc. There have even been such times when people had no homes, food, or family. Thinking of those times should make us feel so much more grateful for what we do have. Hearing Judith Kenedi's story might help.

Judy is an 80 year old resident of Lake Wildwood in Penn Valley, California. She is an active member of her Jewish synagogue and an avid "gym goer." When you meet Judy the first thing you notice is her thick accent. Most would mistake it for a New York, accent but it is actually her native accent from her home country of Hungary. Judy emigrated from Hungary to the United States in the spring of 1946, bringing her incredible story of perseverance, faith in God, hope for the future, and the fight for her life with her.

When Judy was 15, going on 16, her life was forever changed. The year was 1944, and Germany began its attack and process of taking complete control over Hungary. World War II was already half over, but Hungary was the last country to experience the Nazi invasion. Judy was in her eighth year of schooling, but after the Germans took over, everything changed. The Jewish schools were closed; she was forced to wear a yellow star at all times; and she was given a curfew, along with everyone else in the Jewish community of Miskolc, her home town.

Being part of a family of modest means, she wasn't able to have as elaborate an adolescence as other teenagers at the time. But after the Nazis took over, her whole teenage life was taken from her. "I feel like I was robbed of my youth," Judy commented as she told her story.

Judy said she was very grateful for her closely knit family though. Most of her family lived in Miskolc also, and they were all part of the Jewish community. Judy lived with her mother, Rose, and her brother, Leslie, who was two years older than her. Her father was a traveling salesman who was in San Domingo, modern day Haiti, for the

duration of the War. Judy's first encounter with the harshness of the situation she was in was when her seventeen and a half year old brother was thrown into jail for being on the streets without the Star of David visibly on his person. In order to visit her brother and bring him food, she had to dress up as a peasant girl and act like she had no relation to him. The imprisonment of her brother left Judy and her mother on their own, but they still had the rest of their extended family for support.

In May of 1944, Judy was hit with another taste of the evils of WWII when she, her family, and the rest of the Jewish community of Miskolc were forced to move into the ghetto. Judy and her mother were oppressively crowded into a friend's two room apartment where they shared an outhouse with six other tenants and lived without electricity. They lived in the ghetto with six other people for about a month full of uncertainty. No one knew what was going on outside of the prison they had to live in, and gossip began to spread fear amongst all.

After a month of living in the ghetto, all the Jews were summoned over a loudspeaker to bring only what they could carry and line up in rows of five outside the gate. They were marched through the streets and out of the town in a parade of humiliation. Judy's mother told her to stand strong and take pride in who she was. The parade ended at an old brick factory where everyone had to live for a good two weeks. The men were sent outside to work, and Judy was picked to be a "suitcase inspector" of any new arrivals. Her job was to sort through people's luggage and decide what they could keep and what the Nazis believed was unnecessary. Judy said she really struggled at this time because she didn't want to take from her fellow Jews, but she also wanted to stay alive.

Out of the blue about two weeks into living at the factory, everyone was loaded onto cattle cars and sent on a two day journey to an unknown destination. There was no water or restroom available to anyone, and Judy was full of even more fear as she watched some people go crazy right before her eyes. The train dropped her and everyone else off at the gates of Auschwitz, a Jewish extermination camp. Judy clung to her mother's side as they walked through the entrance of hell. She was torn from her mother as the Nazi's separated the young from the old, and to this day, Judy can never forget the look on her mother's face. It was a look that told Judy she would never see her mother again but not to give up hope. Judy never did see her mother again and was left alone as a sixteen year old girl to survive the horrors ahead of her.

Immediately after she arrived at Auschwitz, Judy and all the other Jews were put through a "sanitation" process. They were taken into huge shower chambers, forced to undress and leave all their clothing behind. They were stripped and shaven of all body hair and given new and foreign clothing to wear for the rest of their stay at Auschwitz. Judy was full of humiliation during the whole process because of the age she was at. Losing her hair made her feel like she was losing her identity, so in attempt to regain it, she tore a piece of white cloth from her skirt to make a bandana. She was sent to a barrack to live with 300 other people. There was nothing but dirt on the ground and

everyone was lucky if they got food during the day. The people around her slowly wasted into nothingness as they cried and slept the miserable days away.

Every morning, the barracks were counted to make sure no one had moved or tried to escape. During one of these countings, her barrack turned out to be two over, so she and another girl were randomly chosen to move to the neighboring barrack. Judy had come to know some of the people in her home barrack so during an air raid that night, she decided to return. The next morning during counting, a Nazi soldier realized she was in the wrong barrack and dragged her outside onto the gravel. Her white bandana had given her away. Judy was convinced she was going to be shot, but the soldier made her kneel with two rocks in her hands for a half an hour while a German Shepherd circled her. Whether this was to try and scare Judy to death or just make her give in, she will never know. The whole time she just kept telling herself to not give in; she could get through this.

An oddity Judy noticed about Auschwitz was that the group she arrived with never received number tattoos. They had no identity whatsoever. If one were to try to find someone during a counting or gathering, they would call out their last name and the town they were originally from. Gravediggers worked outside the gates of Auschwitz to bury the bodies of exterminated Jews. One day while people gathered at the gate to try to receive news about the rest of the world, Judy heard her brother's name called out. She recognized him and was filled with a sense of hope, knowing he was still alive. He told her not to do anything, to just obey the Nazis and keep fighting for her life. She never saw him again.

As the chances of victory for Germany began to grow slimmer, the Nazis changed their whole game plan and decided that killing as many Jews as possible was more important to them than winning. Judy was moved with a large group of Jews to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. There were some small improvements to this camp: tents with straw on the ground and food. Judy's cousin Mary had survived through Auschwitz and was with her at Bergen Belsen where they befriended another girl. The three of them stuck together as they were moved once again to a Wehrmacht soldier's compound. They were given work to do, which was a huge improvement as it filled them with a sense of accomplishment. By this time it was mid April of 1945. Judy had been a prisoner of the Nazi's for almost a year. She was able to receive news of the War from a soldier in the compound who she had somewhat befriended. She daydreamed during the day and made up elaborate stories of a better life in determination to get through this tragedy.

One night, she and the rest of the Jews at the compound were forced to march to a train station. Once onboard, they were taken north, then south, then east, and west as the Nazis attempted to keep them from the rescue of the Russians. The Germans finally gave in and dumped the Jews at Theresianstadt. Judy watched in awe as the SS German soldiers walked away from them that day. "I have no idea how I survived through it," she commented as she began to wrap up her story.

Judy and her cousin Mary stayed in Theresianstadt for a couple of weeks until a train came to take them both back to Hungary. Neither of them were sure which members of their family were still alive. When they arrived in Hungary, they found another cousin and stayed with her. Judy returned to Miskolc in search of any remaining belongings she could find, but all there was left were four photographs of family members. She found them in the apartment she and her mother had lived in while in the ghetto. Her original house had been completely destroyed during the war. Judy's father received news that she had survived the Holocaust and sent for her immediately. She arrived in New York in the spring of 1946 at the age of eighteen. Judy married a boy she had known from Hungary before the War had started the same year she moved to the United States. They were married for fifty five years, during which they moved from New York to Grass Valley, California and had two children.

To this day Judy still wonders how she survived the Holocaust. She survived while six million Jews were exterminated, executed, and brutally murdered. "It's amazing how much your inner strength holds you. God was my pillar. I had nothing left but Him and my inner strength." Judy was as young as I am when she was first pulled into this nightmare. She survived with no family, hardly any food and water, and certainly no luxuries because she held onto her soul and put all her faith in God. She speaks out about the horrors of what happened during the Holocaust, saying it's very possible it can happen again. "Genocide is the end result of hatred, prejudice, ignorance, and indifference. When scapegoating and stereotyping go unchallenged, sooner or later we all become enslaved. I feel those of us who survived have an obligation to warn you that it can happen again, anywhere, to any people. I feel we must speak out, we must remember from generation to generation because if we remember, then maybe it will help shield us from repeating such an unthinkable event."

What Hitler did to the Jews, the old and sick, the retarded, and the gypsies just disgusts Judy, especially since she was a victim of it. It wasn't just an extermination of these people; it was the dehumanization of them too. "Before Hitler could kill us, he had to dehumanize us. We weren't human in his eyes." He considered his mass murdering humane, especially the mass gassing because carbon monoxide seemed to be painless. This world will forever be scarred by the horrors of the Holocaust, but we should all learn from it and consider Judy's story, along with the stories of other survivors, next time we begin to complain about the insignificant troubles in our lives.

Assemblymember John Laird
District 27



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Elbaum Family

*Interviewed by Wray Morgan Herbert-
King*

Anne Levin

Transcribed by Ali Spickler

Elbaum Family

By Wray Morgan Herbert-King

How Much to Remember

World War II: A period of history in which some of the most brutal acts of inhumanity occurred. A period marked by horror that can never be fully grasped. A period with many, many stories left untold--stories that, once unveiled, may help ensure such wholesale acts of genocide never occur again. For it is only through the stories of particular individuals and families that our minds can grasp the enormity of war and holocaust.

One story we tell today is that of the Elbaum family. Although the Holocaust cast a shadow on Bernard (Bernie) Elbaum as he grew up in the United States in the 1950s, it wasn't until he was a father himself that his parents, Morris and Celia Elbaum, began to reveal the details of their war-time experience.

In 1992 three generations of Elbaums set out to face history. That summer Bernie Elbaum traveled with his parents, wife, sister and two nieces to Poland, the birth place of his mother and father, to visit the graves of a grandfather and uncle he had never known, and the extermination camps which took the lives of others of his family.

"We traveled back to Poland," Bernie says, "because our parents wanted their children and grandchildren to 'see and feel in our hearts and souls' what they had lived through during the Holocaust."

Bernie was aware even as a child of the basic history. The Germans marched into Poland in 1939, and within a year, stripped Jews of their possessions and confined them to ghettos. Subsequently, German forces exterminated some 95 percent of Poland's Jews.

But it was only upon the Elbaum's trip back to Poland that Bernie learned the details of his own family history. The Jewish ghetto in Celia Elbaum's home town of Lask was liquidated in 1942. Some of the Jews of Lask were sent immediately to the nearby death camp of Chelmno, where they were shot and killed, and where pieces of their bones can still be found in the soil.

Until her family accompanied her to visit Lask and Chelmno in 1992, Celia had never told them the story of the liquidation of the Lask ghetto. Only then did Celia recount how the rounding up of the Jews came without notice, and how no one at the time understood the magnitude of what was happening.

"They just came in without notice," Celia said, and started herding people out into the streets. "If there was a sick person in the bed or there were people who didn't manage to get dressed fast enough they were shot in the house."

Celia went on to elaborate how these acts of cruelty happened right in front of her, “Even as we were ready to march, people who came out of the house late were shot there on the spot, just for being late.”

After being rounded up, the Jews of Lask were confined in a Polish Catholic church for three days and three nights. “After three nights the Germans made a selection where the young and healthy were sent to a nearby city to live in the Jewish ghettos and the rest were sent to death camps.” Celia, who was imprisoned in that church, never saw her father again after that fateful day when the German regime made its final selection.

Those selected in the Church to survive, including Celia and her brother and two sisters, were crammed into tiny and inhumane cattle-cars. The train ride to Lodz, Poland (the nearest city to Lask), should have taken no more than 45 minutes. But the ride by cattle-car ended up taking three to four days with no accommodations. Celia like the others, held everything in until the cramps were unbearable and there was no other option.

Only when the Elbaum family traveled back to Auschwitz to better understand their family’s history, did Celia speak of the first day she and her siblings arrived at the concentration camps.

“The first day we arrived at Auschwitz we lost our sister, Dora. We went through selection and they took her into the gas chamber. We arrived at Auschwitz at night, and they took my sister away, she was only 22 years old.”

Celia went on to say, “I remember I asked what happened to my sister, where did she go? And the officer replied, ‘you want to know where she is going?’ And as she pointed up to the chimney she said, ‘that is where she is going.’ ”

Bernie's father, Morris, also spoke in detail about his war-time experiences for the first time during the family trip back to Poland. Only then did Morris tell his family of the trip he took by cattle car, and of how he was allowed to leave Auschwitz because he volunteered to do slave labor in a German factory.

In 1945 after being liberated from the last of the series of labor and concentration camps, Morris Elbaum and Celia Rothstein returned home to Poland to reconnect with their lost friends and family--they found only a few still living. It was during this time in Poland that they found each other, and after only a few months, married. However, with looming anti-Semitism in Poland, they moved to a resettlement camp in Germany for two years where they waited on their passage to the United States.

Even the passage over the Polish border was not simple. Morris and Celia Elbaum crossed the border from Communist Poland to Germany while being shot at by Polish border guards. After two years in the resettlement camp it was through great luck and family ties that they were able to immigrate to the United States.

Celia Rothstein Elbaum battled with depression during Bernie's childhood, a product of the deep pain of her loss and of an irrational guilt she bore for having survived when others did not.

For Bernie, growing up hearing his parents talk about the war made it seem "unreal, not possible," and led him to believe as a child that "this world is tinged with horror."

Bernie grew up without ever knowing any of his grandparents or most of those who would have been his aunts, uncles or cousins. But he feels joy that his own son has had the opportunity to grow up having a close loving relationship with his grandparents.

The Elbaum family trip back to Poland is recorded in a 55 minute film produced and directed by Bernie's wife, Nina Koocher, titled *How Much to Remember*. The film's title conveys the dilemma faced by survivors and their children and grandchildren--and by all of us--in deciding how much of the horror of the holocaust to hold fast in memory.

As Bernie Elbaum recalls, "I didn't really want to imagine my father in these cattle-cars, I didn't want to hear it." For their part, Bernie's parents, Morris and Celia, wanted to spare their children the burden of knowing the details of their history, and so they kept the details from them until they were adults.

But much as Bernie did not want to hear those horrific stories, and Morris and Celia wanted to refrain from recounting them, they all knew of their importance. As Bernie states in the film, "I do think history is very essential for people to understand who they are. I cannot begin to understand who I am without reflecting on my history..."

And in this history are buried stories of Jewish survival and endurance in the face of unfathomable obstacles. Bernie's niece Sally Rosen, Morris, and Celia's granddaughter, put their grandparents' experiences into perspective when one of them said, "When I saw the pain of my grandparents, more than I ever had seen before, it just seemed more real. We learn about the Holocaust in history class and we think about it as so long ago. But as I stood there I realized it wasn't."

Anne Levin

As told by Anne F.N. Levin, Transcribed by Ali Spickler

The Memories of the Dead

My parents and I were on a train emigrating to the United States from Austria at the exact moment Hitler's troops were invading Czechoslovakia. A miracle protected me from the fate of my grandparents, two aunts, and six million other Jews... 25 times the population of the entire population of Monterey County... a compelling obligation to remember.

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize winner and a Holocaust survivor, spoke in Santa Cruz during the spring of 1996. He said that we, the living, are responsible for the memories of the dead, and we are equally responsible for what we do with those memories... another compelling obligation.

My goal is not to dwell on the all too familiar atrocities, but to add to your sad images of anonymous piles of shoes, combs, and skeletons, the faces and personalities of one particular family- my family- typical and unremarkable except for the simple fact that they kept so many memorabilia.

I was almost three years old on one of Hitler's many infamous days, March 13, 1939. My parents and I were on the train from Vienna to Trieste on board an Italian ship for passage to New York when news of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia reached us. From that day forward almost no Jews were able to leave Austria.

U.S immigration quotas required affidavits from American sponsors, willing to guarantee our future conduct, employment, and financial security before granting visas. Understandably, such guarantees were not easy to obtain or we could have left earlier.

My father, a decorated Austrian officer in World War I, spent three years in a Siberian Prison of War Camp, escaped to complete his Law Degree at the University of Vienna, and eventually became director of the Rothschild Bank. After the Anschluss, Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938, we were temporarily safe because of my father's military record and his position in the bank.

With each terrible incident of anti-Semitism along with expelling Jewish children from schools, parks, hospitals, Boy Scouts, playgrounds, streets, theatres, and shops, it became critical to get my thirteen-year-old brother, John, to safety so that at least he could be spared from the impending terrors. Finally, a truly humanitarian couple in Detroit agreed to sponsor him. My parents anxiously and courageously packed him off to the United States.

Try to imagine the agony of sending your only son to a foreign country with the heartbreaking fear that most probably you would never see him again.

The time after my brother left must have seemed an eternity, the bitterest cold winter in years; my parents burning their furniture because Jews were not allowed fuel. Our home was searched, most valuables confiscated or damaged, while friends and relatives were rounded up and sent to camps. Identity papers, bearing swastikas and using the prefix "Israel" for Jewish men, or "Sarah" for Jewish women, were issued to my parents and to me and had to be carried at all times.

After Herman and Julia Mathias in Detroit agreed to sponsor us to join my brother, the U.S. Consulate granted us visas and the Nazis issued our priceless passports to freedom.

And so we emigrated... or I would not be here today, feeling so lucky and quoting one of my parents' favorite sayings in German: "Gluck und glas, wie leicht bricht das!" which translates to "Luck and glass; how easily they shatter."

The journey to the States was not without its own adventures. During our two days in Trieste waiting to embark the S.S. Vulcania, works of art destined for the New York World's Fair were being off-loaded because war seemed imminent. I developed a 102-degree temperature so my parents had to bribe the ship's officers to let me board. During a brief stop in Algiers, I disappeared between some zoo animals which were awaiting their own emigration processing. This caused my already frightened father more anxiety and he never told my mother about the incident. Both parents were terrified that we would be turned back until we safely passed through the Gibraltar Straits.

What remained of our furniture, including a grandfather clock in which was smuggled some jewelry, had been shipped separately and collided with an iceberg in the North Atlantic, destroying much but not sinking completely- add the proverbial insult to injury!

My mother and father never complained about leaving so much behind. My father became an accountant and my mother used her photo retouching skills to earn extra money while learning English through radio soap operas in her darkroom. I, of course, learned many of life's difficult lessons from Stella Dallas, Young Widder Brown, Ma Perkins, and When a Girl Marries. My father had spoken perfect English already in Vienna, but my mother attended night school to supplement her soap opera lessons and to learn American history.

My parents retired to Santa Cruz in 1964 and often walked on the beautiful campus because it reminded them of the Vienna Woods, so it seemed fitting to me that our family's memorabilia be housed at UCSC to support the Endowed Chair in Holocaust Studies. There are more than eighty items in the Neufeld Family Archive of McHenry Library, including photo albums, music, rare books, an extensive Third Reich stamp collection, medals, war mementos, stitchery, laces, cameras, the personal items my

brother brought to the United States in 1938, the chilling Nazi documents, my mother's well-worn prayer book, and two of our emigration suitcases. The exhibit will be on display again in the future.

Assemblymember Mark Leno
District 13



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Irma Broclawski

Interviewed by Aileen Evans

Mini Fox

Interviewed by Clare Golding

Miriam Wilner

Interviewed by Diana Truong

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Irma Broclawski

By Aileen Evans

Forced To Adjust

Cold, dark, and deserted. The forest was unpleasant, nothing like her hometown. As Irma and her mother escaped into the forest one afternoon, a Polish man fortunately spotted them and took them back to his place. This kind man offered them a hideout to keep clear of eager Germans who were hungry for any Jew they could find. While the two might have been deemed safe because they were in a closed house, the conditions were nothing like fourteen-year-old Irma was accustomed to. The days in the attic were hot and she had nothing to eat. This was only the beginning of her long journey.

Irma Ferber was born on January 26, 1925 to her father David Ferber, a successful lawyer, and her mother Josephina Ferber, a housewife. Irma had two older brothers and her family was in very good shape prior to the outbreak of World War II. During the years of the war's escalation, Polish newspapers wrote about Hitler, but Irma and her family never imagined that he would destroy millions of people. Irma's family felt relatively secure. Because her father had his own law business and many clients, Irma rarely had to suffer any hardships. She was spoiled as the youngest girl in her family.

In September of 1939, the tragedy hit. As the Germans occupied the streets of Irma's small town just seven kilometers from Bohnia, Poland, her life suddenly transformed into something beyond her imagination. As Hitler took control, Irma's father, David, could no longer practice law because he was Jewish. Shortly after, David passed from a sudden heart attack in 1940. This devastated her family as they began a new stage of their life.

While most Jews were taken away to concentration camps, Irma received forged papers from one of her father's former Polish clients. She was one of the few lucky ones to escape under Polish Catholic identification. If it hadn't been for her connection to her father's business, Irma would not have been able live under Polish Catholic identity. Being Catholic provided a better situation than being Jewish during this time as Irma claims that "the Jews were sent to liquidation camps, and the Poles were sent to labor camps." These false papers identified her as "Bronislawa Jalowksa" and Irma came to embrace this new Polish identity. Throughout the rest of her journey during the war, she had to remember her new name, her false parents' names, and her age (which was five years older than her actual age). She could not open her mouth to anyone about her false identity, for she faced the possibility of being caught and then deported to a concentration camp. This was very challenging for Irma as a young girl, but she knew that her life depended on her ability to guard this secret.

It was after receiving these false papers that Irma traveled to the forest and stayed there for two weeks. She and her mother eventually decided to leave because they were

scared that someone would discover they were in hiding. The peasant's wife's brother was mentally unstable, and Irma's mother, Josephina, was scared that he'd blurt out their well-kept secret. The two left the peasant's house and went to Krakow, the last place they would ever see each other. At this point, the Germans had closed the streets in the ring in the middle of the city and had taken all the Polish people to work in German labor camps. The separation from her mother signaled the beginning of Irma's journey in and out of different German factories until the Germans were defeated in 1945.

Irma was then sent to AEG Fabric in Berlin, Germany as a Polish worker. She spent three months at the Freidrich Strasse 4 Industry, where she did metal work for the Germans. This work, which consisted of making parts for German airplanes, was strenuous for a seventeen-year-old girl. Irma spent her days operating big machines in the same summer dress she wore when she was originally sent to Berlin. She had to wash her dress at night, and put it back on the next day. Scorching hot aluminum burned her skin multiple times, but she had no other choice but to follow German orders.

After three long months in Berlin, Irma decided to illegally escape to Köln Rhein, Germany with the help of a Polish worker who was coming from Lodz for vacation. Her escape was risky, but as she says, "You can do anything when your life is in danger." Irma took this risk because one of her brothers was a prisoner of war in Köln Rhein and she was trying to reunite with him. Upon her arrival, Irma's brother tried to get her a job with a doctor he knew. However, Irma was not able to meet his demanding standards as she was ultimately fired when she fainted in front of him.

Irma then moved on and worked in a different labor camp in the same city of Köln Rhein in 1943. This factory, named "I.G. Farben Industrie", produced silk products that were used in parachute construction. A number of Polish, Russian, and French girls filled the factory and completed difficult tasks every day. The hardest part about this job was that many of the women had children and expected to take them home to care for them. However, being under German occupation, these girls were forced to give up their children to the Germans so the Germans could raise them the "right" way. The Germans thought that each and every child needed to be "Germanized," so they kept each child in a daycare, of which Irma and one of her friends were in charge. Irma and her friend were responsible for forty children, all ranging from seven days to one and a half years old. This caretaking job was very taxing because she had to cook for, feed, change, and burp many children. Occasionally she had to give up her time to eat her own daily meal.

After a number of months, Irma and her brother escaped to Vienna, Austria because her brother was asked to go to Gestapo for questioning by the Germans. There, Irma worked as a house helper and in another metal factory. This Austrian metal factory produced German ammunition for the war. This was the last place Irma worked before the war was over.

In 1945, Irma went back to Poland in search of living family members. It took her six long weeks of traveling by train before she reached the Polish border due to the large amount of destruction after the war. Initially, Irma was not able to locate any of her

family members until she remembered that she had an uncle living in Krakow before the war broke out. She was able to locate him and ended up living with him and his wife for the next four years while working in various offices in Krakow.

The next stage of Irma's life happened quickly, but lasted for over fifty-six years. In 1949, Irma met Bernard Broclawski in her hometown of Krakow. The two started dating and, within two months, they were married. They had a daughter named Joanna in 1950.

In 1969, Irma and her family decided to leave Poland because "they took Jews from high positions and took away our [Polish] nationality." Irma, her husband, and her daughter lived in Chicago, Illinois for twenty years before moving to San Francisco, California. Irma and her husband had been married for fifty-six and a half years, until her husband passed away in January of 2007.

Irma has never traveled back to Poland because she was not allowed to during the communist regime. Today, while the regime has changed, Irma feels she is too old to travel back. After taking many risks and embracing a false identity, Irma survived an incredible journey.

Mini Fox

By Clare Golding

Mini Fox is a woman who has struggled, loved, and hoped for a better life. Mini began her journey as Mini Birman in Lodz, Poland on December 24th, 1923. During her early years she went to school and enjoyed the simplicities of life, such as her family and the education she received. Soon, all of these things were taken away from her due to Hitler's occupation of Poland, which began in 1939. This was the beginning of her struggles, which defined her life in numerous ways. However, the only reason why Mini had to even experience this was the mere fact that she was Jewish.

16 years old and wanting to live life like every other teenage girl, she was moved to the Lodz ghetto where she could not attend school and lived in a home with two tables and two beds. This new life was meager in comparison to the one she lived previously. She was isolated and forced to give up her beliefs. Yet, the Birman family continued to celebrate the one true thing they had left, their religion. The Birmans would sit by candlelight and celebrate the high Holy Days as all of their stomachs growled with hunger and thoughts of food shifted in and out of their minds. Her father, Manala Birman, was constantly tired from his demanding job at a factory that made patches for the Nazis. His hands were ensconced in blisters from the machines that punctured his tough skin, but he continued to work every day handling the patches which identified the evil-doers themselves. There, he worked for countless hours and died due to the stress and starvation in 1941.

Following the tragic death of her father, her mother, her sister Guta, and her were relocated to Auschwitz, which was located in German-occupied southern Poland. It took its name from the nearby town of Oświęcim (*Auschwitz* in German), situated about 50 kilometers west of Kraków and 286 kilometers from Warsaw. Approaching Auschwitz, the three remaining Birmans promised to stick together. After this stern and serious vow, they got off the train where a hardhearted Nazi instructed people to "go left and go right". As her mother screamed, "Leave me with the children!", the officer instructed her to go right and the two girls to go left.

The Nazis took away her mother, her father, and her sister, leaving her and her sister to countless hours working in the fields. Following the beginning of her stay, she was again separated from a member of her family, her beloved sister. However, one morning it all changed. She heard a scream from somebody who asked, "Are there any Birmans left?" The screaming voice was coming from her cousin. Her cousin, with a grin stretching from ear to ear, ran to Mini with a blanket and a piece of bread - two objects that were foreign to any resident at Auschwitz. The good news of the cousins discovering each other was tempered with the bad news that Mini's mother had died in the gas chamber on "her journey to the right hand side." It is ironic how directions can shape an individual's life, and unfortunately, Mini's mother was on the losing end. If only the Nazi

soldier had had the heart to let the Birmans stay together, but hearts and Nazis were in direct contrast to each other.

After the winter of her stay at Auschwitz, they were moved to Bergen Belson. In order to get there, they had to march for one day and one night. Mini was afraid, tired and wanted everything to go back to the way it used to be. Nobody focused on past because each and every person on that march was in peril. Lined up six in a row, Mini experienced the puncture of the whip on her malnourished and bruised skin. They finally made it to Bergen Belson, and there began the second part of her journey of hope.

Every night Mini prayed to find her brothers again and for the health and safety of her sister and herself. As corpses began to stack up and the days became colder and colder, Mini became very ill. She had contracted the typhoid virus due to her malnourishment and lack of sleep, which caused her much agony - a feeling she had never experienced before. She and her sister were in different parts of the camp and her selfless sister came every day to check on the status of Mini's deteriorating health. Suddenly Guta stopped coming, causing Mini to assume that her sister had been killed, just like her mother.

A smile was brought to all but Mini when the English liberated Bergen Belsen in 1945. Everyone seized the moment and ran for what they all desired, freedom. Mini was frail, sick with typhoid, and deaf in one ear. She sat alone waiting for someone to help her. Finally, a woman came, insisting that Mini's sister was asking for her. Mini did not have any clothes and the only way to get clothes was to rip them off a corpse. Mini was wearing the clothes of one the people who had died and she ruminated on the thought that it could have been herself among the dead. Mini was taken to an English hospital where her sister sat ill. Nobody thought this would ever happen but there they were in the spring of 1945, together at last.

Mini no longer had to struggle, and continued to love her sister with all of her heart. She continued to hope. She hoped that this atrocity would never happen again. She began to dream that she were to come to a place where she could pursue what she wished. And, finally all of her dreams came true. She found it in the United States of America, a place where she and her family could have "liberty and justice for all," something she says she never received or found in Poland.

Miriam Wilner

By Diana Truong

Hoping for Dreams

Resting on a comfortable chair in her living room, Miriam Wilner, with a huge smile on her face, began the story of her life, one filled with joy, love, faith, and most importantly - HOPE.

On May 9th, 1917, Miriam Bleich became the newest member of a Jewish Orthodox family in Lvov, Poland. Little did she know that her life would become one of immense fortune. In a family of five daughters and a son, her mom, Frieda, ran a grocery store to support the family, while her dad, Isaac, studied the Torah. Her mother, a modernized woman, was easygoing and quite lenient. On the contrary, her father, with a long beard and blue eyes, lived for God and to do good deeds. "You could see his goodness in his face," she says. To this day, she can still picture her father, putting on an apron every Friday, heading down to the local bakery to take the leftovers to pass out to every Jewish family in the neighborhood. Each of her siblings had their own profession. One of her sisters was a dressmaker. Her exceptionally bright brother pursued medicine. He was even sponsored to study medicine at a university in Siena, Italy.

When she was a child, her family resided in a mixed neighborhood, including a few Jewish families. At her public school, only about a sixth of the students were Jewish. Therefore, as a child, she did not receive religious studies through school. However, her family environment remained extremely religious. Due to her father's devout beliefs, she had to abide by Orthodox laws. Later on, her family relocated to another part of town, one inhabited by a significant majority of Jewish families.

Growing up in a society where anti-Semitism flourished, Miriam never questioned her faith. Her family instituted the idea of: "You never question God." As she matured, she always asked herself and nobody else, "Why?" She never understood why only her religion was targeted. There were countless incidents where she was in difficult positions. Whenever disparaged or ridiculed for her faith, she simply brushed it off. She never retaliated, but rather, simply took everything in due to fear of the consequences of her actions.

Her family dreamed of relocating to Israel someday. There, they would be able to practice their religion freely. They pictured Israel as a land of free worship. However, history forbade this dream from fulfillment. Not only were they prevented from traveling to Israel, but weren't even free to leave their country!

At the start of the war, the government assumed control over every business in town. Since her mother's grocery store was such a small business, it remained opened for a small period of time. After the government took over their store, the family fled to her

mother's hometown of Bobkra. Her family's lives were extinguished after they were transported to labor camps.

Luckily, she was not sent to the labor camps, for she assumed the identity of her Catholic friend who was leaving Poland to marry in England. With her new Catholic identity, she took a job as a governess for a family. In the morning, she would take the children to the park; in the afternoon, she would assist them with their homework.

One December day, in a light spring coat, she was walking in the streets, shopping for presents. Suddenly, she was stopped by a policeman. The skeptical policeman noticed that her eyes made her seem suspicious. He took her to the local police station, and started to interrogate her about her religion. When asked to recite a prayer, she delivered it fluently. However, the police remained dubious, so he asked her another question, "How many times does the bell ring for confession?" Thanks to her previous intense studying of Catholicism, she knew that this was a trick question, so she replied, "The bell doesn't ring at all." With this particular correct answer, she was free to go. Unfortunately, as she was returning to her employers' home, she sensed that someone was following her. She boarded a trolley and returned to the house. With this sense of insecurity, she resigned from her job and returned to Lvov. In Lvov, she took a job as a dressmaker. Someone informed her about a longtime family friend who was in hiding. Her visit to see this man would alter her life forever...

When she was a little girl, her sister was seeing a man named Abraham Wilner. One night, when returning from a date, a stranger hit his head with a cane. This scarred him, and convinced him to move to Palestine. When Abraham asked her sister to move with him, her conservative parents did not permit this. And so, since he was moving alone, Abraham decided to set off to Israel instead. In 1939, he returned to Lvov to attend his sister's wedding, but was not allowed to leave again. So his family went into hiding underground. When Mitzi decided to return home in the May of 1944, she went to visit Abraham. During their encounter, Abraham warned her, "It's too dangerous for you to be outside, stay here, I'll pay for you." After the liberation in June, the two were married in November.

Since her aunt lived in the United States, she and her husband decided to relocate, but first they needed to move to the other side of Poland. From there, they traveled to Prague's American Council. Astonishingly, her cousin in America was the bodyguard for First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, which eased the immigration process.

Her husband, her daughter and her arrived in New York not long after. She worked in interior decorating. In the U.S., she had two more daughters. Her first daughter became a lawyer; her second daughter owns a business, and her youngest daughter earned a doctorate in public health from Harvard University. She learned English through school and, after her husband died in 1975, she moved to San Diego, where she developed heart problems. Since her son-in-law is a cardiologist, she once again moved to San Francisco, where she now resides.

“The United States is the only place in the world where each person is given the opportunity to be whomever they choose to be.” Miriam Wilner has lived an extraordinary life. Though her family, along with countless Jews, was deprived of the opportunity to pursue their dreams and aspiration, Miriam continues to encourage and motivate others to reach for the stars. In a land where anything is possible, don’t follow your dreams, chase them.

Assemblymember Lloyd Levine
District 40



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

"Peter Abraham"

Interviewed by David Marias

Lidia Budgor

Interviewed by Laura Lindeen

Peter Daniels

Interviewed by Michael Koenig

Jona Goldrich

Interviewed by Jessica Deutchman

Charlotte Huffstedder

Interviewed by Sophia Lin & Dan Ovadia

Hanka Kent

Interviewed by Gabrielle Gordon

Hillel Krimalovski

*Interviewed by Ernestine Fu & Moshe
Carmeli*

Paula Lebovics

Interviewed by Samantha Haley Simons

David & Eva Lenga

Interviewed by Jillian & Rebecca Elbaum

Hedy Orden

Interviewed by David Gole

Jeanine Strauss

Interviewed By Karen Shein



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"Peter Abraham"

By David Marias

A Survivor's Tale

Peter Abraham was born during World War II in Amsterdam in 1942. Since he was an infant during the war, his memories are scarce and the details have been filled in by his family and by others. However, his memories have left an indelible imprint upon him.

When Peter was born, Holland was already occupied by the Germans. Before World War II broke out, during the Great Depression, two of his uncles moved to South Africa to find work. Peter's parents had planned on joining everyone else in South Africa. When Peter's mother became pregnant, his parents had to delay their move. Within four months of Peter's birth, the Germans began to round up the Jews for deportation to concentration camps and Peter's parents went into hiding in Amsterdam. It was too risky to have Peter hide with them. Peter was taken away by members of the Dutch underground to be hidden in a faraway Dutch province hide so that he too could have a chance of survival.

What Peter does recall of the time he was hidden was the cold weather, and the sound of war planes flying overhead. It took ten months for the Dutch underground to find a place for him to stay. He arrived at his host family in terrible condition. This was a family of six that lived in a north eastern province of Holland. Being an infant, all he really did was eat, sleep, and cry. All of his memories from the war came from this time that he spent with this family in Holland.

Later in life, Peter was told that when he arrived, he was covered in sores, and barely alive. The family had to rush him to a specialist doctor in a faraway town to get him treated. The father of the family was a member of the Dutch underground, and was one of the leaders responsible for finding families to hide Jewish children in. When Peter arrived, he had no identifying papers and all that the family was told was his first name.

Meantime, the Nazis had discovered virtually all of the Jews' hiding places in the cities and larger towns, and had rounded them up for deportation. Many years later, after a lot of research, Peter discovered that his family had been taken to Sobibor extermination camp in Poland, a sister death camp to the infamous Treblinka. Peter learned that he had lost his parents, both of his grandparents, an uncle, and two aunts. By the time that the war was over, Peter's host family had grown attached to him. When one of his uncles from South Africa found him through a displaced persons list, and wanted to adopt him, a legal battle began between Peter's birth family and his rescuing family. The court ruled in favor of Peter's uncle. With that, in 1947 his uncle took him to South Africa, where he adopted him. South Africa restricted foreign war refugees from

entering the country. Peter was not allowed to enter and become a citizen unless his uncle adopted him.

The next major memory that Peter has is when he arrived in South Africa. He remembers the sunshine, the spacious homes that he saw, large gardens, and meeting his new mother and sister. He also remembers the large dog belonging to his family. Peter remembers learning South African English very quickly. In Holland, he only knew a language called Friesian, which sounds like a mixture of German and Danish. Peter easily adjusted to his new life in South Africa.

When Peter was in South Africa, the white minority controlled the country and racism was entrenched by law. Peter later realized that after being victimized in Europe by racism and hate directed towards him, as a white person in his new country he had become a beneficiary of bigotry and racism.

It would take many years for Peter to realize how hard it must have been for his new mother to accept him as her son. The adoption was very unusual since she had not even set eyes on him before his arrival. She already had one child, and was pregnant with a second. A year after Peter's arrival she had one more daughter, so within a year and a half, the family went from having one child to having four. This was not easy for the family, but they managed. Peter received an education in South Africa, and while in college was active in a group that was advocating for the rights of black people in South Africa, and to end segregation. In 1979, Peter would leave his home to move to the United States of America.

Peter left South Africa for many reasons. Tension was high. The black people wanted their rights, the rest of the world wanted the Afrikaans Nationalist government to give them their rights, and there was pressure from all other nations in the form boycotts. The boycotts eventually hurt the black people the most because it resulted in higher unemployment. In addition, the government was acting very harshly with protestors, sometimes firing upon them. Also, like many others, he feared that a civil war or a race war was imminent. So he left South Africa with his sister, her husband, and their two children. They entered the United States and lived in San Diego. Several years later, he was joined by his two parents and one of his two other sisters. One of these sisters moved to Los Angeles where she still lives and works. His (adoptive) parents are no longer alive.

Later, Peter would come to realize that he had made the right decision to leave, but that he had left for the wrong reasons. There was never a civil or race war, and everything was calming down. Nelson Mandela was freed and open elections were held. Blacks were given their rights. However, crime has skyrocketed, unemployment now stands at 40% and the country now has one of the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDS. Peter says that, "Half of the things that we worried about never happened, and half of the things that happened we never could have foreseen." When Peter moved to America, he and his brother-in-law opened two clothing stores in San Diego. After five years, they closed them. Next, Peter went into public accounting. He had accounting experience in South Africa, and wanted to be a Certified Public Accountant in America. He wrote and

passed the CPA exam and moved to Los Angeles, where he worked for several accounting firms before. Peter has recently retired from accounting and still resides in Los Angeles.

Peter submitted the names of the Dutch family that hosted him to the Yad Vashem organization in Jerusalem, Israel. Their names were entered on the list of righteous gentiles and they were given the honor of planting a tree in the Garden of the Righteous on the Yad Vashem campus. Peter Abraham is enjoying his retirement and spends time with his family as often as he can.

Lidia Budgor

By Laura Lindeen

Lidia Budgor: An Indestructible Spirit

On September 1, 1939, fourteen-year-old Lidia Budgor's father announced to her, "Daughter, the war broke out." That night, bombers were already over their roof. She lived in Lodz, Poland, the second largest industrial city, with her parents and four younger siblings. They were an extremely close Orthodox Jewish family, living among at least two-hundred thousand other Jews in the city. Attending an esteemed Jewish high school, Lidia's school work and social surroundings had overshadowed her awareness of the war. But on that fateful Friday night, the war became her life.

As a young blonde girl, Lidia looked like so many other Polish women and thus was able to cautiously venture onto the streets of Lodz, even when Jews were no longer safe there. At the young age of fourteen years old, she began her unceasing duties as the breadwinner and protector of her family, a duty that lasted for the majority of the war. Beginning in December 1939, all Jews were deported to the slums of Lodz. In an attempt to avoid this, Lidia's mother quickly escaped to Tomaszow, Poland, taking with her three of Lidia's younger siblings. Lidia rushed to the train station to give her mother a loaf of bread, which she had hollowed and packed with precious jewelry, risking her own safety to ensure her family's security. But news soon circulated that the ghetto would be closed to new entrants within the next few months. Lidia's youngest brother trekked the fifty kilometers (approximately thirty-one miles) from Tomaszow, battling frostbite, for the sole purpose of keeping the family together. Lidia's mother and sisters returned to Lodz, and, along with two aunts, the family moved into the ghetto.

Conditions were horrible, and the nine people lived in a single room with three beds and an eighteen square-foot kitchen. For almost five years, they lived on meager rations: six ounces of salami were rationed for several months and single loaves of bread were split between nine people. However, families in the ghetto received letters from deported loved ones that told of the great conditions of the concentrations camps – letters that Jews were forced to write before the Nazis murdered them. These letters at first brought hope, but when the truth became known, a wave of fear splashed everyone. Everyone in the ghetto was forced to work. While many of the women made clothing and goods for the German army, Lidia worked in numerous office jobs. She assigned apartments to the Jews entering the ghetto and at storefronts punched ration coupons, entitling people to receive their measly food portions. These jobs, paired with her striking blonde hair and beautiful face, allowed Lidia to form vital connections with the Jewish policemen. These affiliations protected her family, shielding them from deportation. When random Jews in the ghetto were selected to be sent to concentration camps, the Jewish policemen purposely ignored Lidia's attic, where her family would hide. Another time, her family had already been put onto a streetcar to be deported. However, one of Lidia's young policemen friends smuggled the nine family members

safely back into their home. Lidia's connections could only protect them for so long. In 1944, all remaining Jews were to be deported. The police hid Lidia's family, as well as a thousand others, in a prison where, shockingly, the food and the conditions were better than those in the ghetto. Lidia recalls eating eggs, a commodity she had not seen in five years. But finally, on August 28, 1944, Lidia and her family were deported to Auschwitz, Poland.

Very few families were still intact at this time, but Lidia's strength enabled her family to remain complete. Together, they arrived at Auschwitz, Poland, in September 1944. While marching into the camp, they immediately noticed the smoke rising from crematoriums and comprehended their fate awaiting them in the gas chambers. Lidia's eight-year-old sister grabbed her hand and questioned, "Will it hurt?" The women were separated from the men, but Lidia's younger brother rushed to their mother and gave her a final kiss on the cheek. The men of the family were never seen again. Immediately after, Lidia was separated from her mother and sisters, who were taken to the gas chambers. After five years of survival, Lidia had lost her entire family in only a single day.

Stripped of her clothing, Lidia was forced to stand naked in front of a German officer. He eyed her body, dehumanizing her with every glance, and demanded that her pretty blonde hair not be shaved off. In response, the enraged haircutter shaved the middle of Lidia's head, removing her dignity along with her hair. Lidia requested that the remaining hair be shaved off as well, and she was given mismatched clothing, including an oversized man's jacket. When she had first arrived at Auschwitz, a French inmate had approached her and offered his assistance. Lidia's little brother had pressed a photograph of Lidia into the man's hand, requesting, "Help my sister!" The Frenchman brought her salami and a loaf of bread, but the crowds of starving women in the barracks immediately attacked and devoured the food.

In September 1944 and only ten days after her arrival at Auschwitz, Lidia was taken to Stutthof concentration camp. She obtained a job in the kitchen and, whenever possible, threw pieces of bread out of the window to starving women. In January 1945, she was evacuated with thousands of other Jews. Suffering from typhus, Lidia nearly died while battling the freezing winter. Fortunately, Mary Procell, who had been saved by the bread that Lidia had thrown from the kitchen window, was also a participant in the six-week death march. Mary bathed and helped feed Lidia, bringing her soup and cooling her one-hundred and three degree Fahrenheit (approximately thirty-nine degrees Celsius) fever with cold snow. In the latter part of February 1945, over two-thousand women, including Lidia, were left in an abandoned barn to perish. Mary again saved Lidia's life by bringing her back to the nearby kitchen that she worked in. There, the women removed lice from Lidia's body and helped her recover from typhus, saving her life.

On March 10, 1945, the Soviet army liberated the women from Kolkau, Poland, where Lidia, along with nine others, had been hiding in a pig sty. Along with a young Polish boy, they stole a horse and wagon. Starving for food and shelter, they occupied a

German family's house in Slutsk for about three months. In June 1945, Lidia and the others boarded an open freight car and journeyed for forty-eight hours back to Lodz. But the city was nothing like they remembered, and their homes were occupied by others. Lodz held nothing for Lidia, so she returned to the abandoned house in Slutsk. Soon after, she moved to a displacement camp and met her future husband, who had also been imprisoned at Stutthof. Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization, smuggled the couple to Vienna, Austria, and from there they traveled to Linz, Austria. Lidia married her husband, and they stayed in buildings that had been previously occupied by the German Army. Next traveling through the mountains into Munich, Lidia's son Aaron was born in 1948 in a displacement camp.

Waiting for immigration papers, Lidia's young family remained in Munich until 1952. They then traveled to New York before moving to Dallas. Four years later, they moved to New Jersey, and in 1959, the family finally settled in California. Lidia's unyielding spirit manifested itself in the United States, where she supported her family while sometimes only earning three dollars per week. From the time she was fourteen-years-old to the time that she had her own child, Lidia had been a caretaker. Yet, without her ambitious personality and everlasting drive, Lidia would not be alive today to share her unbelievable story. She survived the Holocaust because of her internal capabilities and immeasurable strength. Lidia Budgor truly is an indestructible spirit.

Peter Daniels

By Michael Koenig

Peter Daniels was born in Berlin, Germany in 1936. When he was two years old, his father and his father's family fled to China as most national borders had closed down for Jews. Peter and his mother remained in Germany. His maternal grandparents, an aunt and several cousins were also in Germany during this time. Peter attended a Jewish kindergarten until it was closed down in 1940. When the Nuremberg laws came into effect, Peter and his family were forced to wear yellow stars and experienced heavy discrimination in public. Peter was sent to live with several distant relatives on the other side of the city for safety at this time also.

In 1941, Peter's maternal grandfather died, and his wife was deported to Auschwitz. Peter's aunt and cousins also disappeared, although he and his mother never found out if they died in the camps or escaped to Palestine. After the disappearance of these relatives, Peter and his mother found themselves in the unfortunate situation of being alone in Berlin in the middle of 1941. Peter's mother found a job in a uniform factory in Berlin, and because of this she was able to get a pass to use the Berlin subways. Since she had to work 5 days a week, Peter was forced to take care of himself for up to eight hours at a time, a rather amazing feat for a four year old child. Peter's mother tried to keep up a strict home-schooling schedule, an extraordinary effort that kept some routine in Peter's life. Peter left the house rarely during this time, as there was little on the streets of Berlin for him. The few times he and his mother left home to shop were unpleasant, as they were only allowed out at certain times and often had to deal with anti-Semitic taunting. Peter and his mother lived like this for two years, avoiding shipment to concentration camps. Like other Jews in Germany, Peter and his mother were forced to wear a yellow star at all times.

In 1943, Peter was at home alone when the Gestapo came to his flat. Two officers waited with Peter for his mother and took them both by truck to a detention center, a basement of an abandoned office building. Here Peter and his mother waited until enough Jews had been rounded up in the area to justify ordering a train. Peter and his mother were forced to get what food they could by bribing the guards. Peter came down with a mysterious illness while in the center; his skin turned yellow. A Nazi inspector who later turned out to be none other than the notorious architect of the Holocaust, Adolph Eichmann, feared that this could be contagious yellow fever instead of ordinary jaundice, and ordered Peter to a hospital for recovery. While he was in the hospital, Peter's mother had a chance to get her and her son's affairs in order. After five days in the hospital, Peter and his mother returned to the detention center, where soon after, they were deported to Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, in a cattle car.

Although Peter was aware of the hardship occurred aboard the train at the time, he learned much more about his experience later on. He remembers not being able to sit or lay down because the box car was too crowded with other people; no food or water, the

train would sometimes stop for hours while more rounded up Jews were herded onto the train. Out of one hundred people who were on that transport, thirty six did not reach Theresienstadt alive. Finally, after almost two days and nights, the train reached the concentration camp. Sleep deprived and malnourished, Peter and all the others walked about two miles from the train into the camp in the middle of the night where everyone was herded into one of the buildings to sleep on wooden floors. The next morning Peter and his mother were separated. Peter assigned to the children's section of the camp, and his mother to the adult section. The next month, Peter had his seventh birthday.

Before the Nazis took over the camp, Terezin, as it is called in Czechoslovakia, had been a military garrison, a civilian prison, and a ghetto for the poor and disadvantaged. In 1940/41 it was converted into a concentration camp for approximately 5,000 people. At the Wannsee Conference in 1942, Theresienstadt was slated to house some 80,000 Jewish World War I veterans and other elderly Jews. Alongside Jewish artists, musicians, writers, scholars and other intellectuals, many non-Jews were also interned here. From 1941 to 1943, about 140,000 Jews were transported to and through Theresienstadt, with as many as 80,000 being held at any one time, severely overcrowding the camp. From Theresienstadt almost 80,000 Jews were shipped to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where women, children, the elderly, and infirm were murdered in the gas chambers. Able-bodied men and boys were used for slave labor until they died exhaustion, disease, or brutality by the guards.

Peter remained in the children's section for two years-until the camp was liberated by the Soviet army. He had his 7th and 8th birthdays in the camp. Food consisted of morning coffee and bread and warm water with stale vegetable soup in the evenings. Hunger was a constant companion to Peter and the other children. When someone got sick, they went to the infirmary to either die or get better because there was no medicine. Many of the children either died of starvation or disease, or were deported to Auschwitz with their parents. Peter, along with other children were put to work in a rock quarry, vegetable field (food for the camp guards) or loading and unloading supplies from trains. Some schooling was tried, but hunger and disease was so prevalent that this was soon abandoned.

Theresienstadt was also the site where Nazis deceived the Red Cross about the nature of the concentration camps. In June of 1944, the Red Cross came for an inspection. To prepare for this, the Nazis beautified a small section of the camp and deported almost 8,000 people during a six week period to Auschwitz to make it appear to the Red Cross that the camp was not overcrowded. The Red Cross fell for the Nazi deception and told the world that the Jews were not being mistreated.

Besides Peter's good luck not dying in the camp from malnutrition or disease, his survival was also due to his mother's survival. As long as she remained alive and kept from being shipped to Auschwitz, Peter was also safe from being shipped out. Had she died in Theresienstadt, Peter would have been on the next transport to Auschwitz as an orphan, and into the gas chambers.

In May, 1945, the Russians liberated Theresienstadt. Peter and his mother returned to a bombed out Berlin. There was little food to either buy or steal, and Peter roamed the streets of Berlin to because there was no school and not much to eat.

In 1947, Peter, his mother, new stepfather and new half sister immigrated to America to start a new life. He was 11 years old and became a US citizen at the age 25. He served in the US Navy, went to college and graduate school, and has a wonderful wife, four grown children, and five grandchildren. At age 71, Peter feels that he is a very, very, lucky man.

Jona Goldrich

By Jessica Deutchman

Six Million Nightmares

“Remember children, the only thing they cannot take from you is in your head unless they kill you.” And with that, a father released a son from his arms for the last time. Jona Goldrich had no idea this hug from his father would be his last.

Jona had always lived comfortably. In his small, primitive town where only fifteen percent of his neighbors had electricity, “when you had enough to eat, you were considered rich.” Jona’s father worked hard out in the fields and there was always enough food on the table each night. Until the Germans came. All light of hope was put out with the sound of their boots stomping through the dust. The crops, gone with every man’s job. Innocence, gone, with the very first gunshot. Jona and his family were taken from their home and placed in a crowded living space along with many of their Jewish neighbors. Jona’s father, along with other men who could not bear the look of their children each night at empty meals, began to work in the black market, stripped now of their jobs and their respect by the soldiers.

In the first few weeks of the Nazi’s invasion, Jona, only fourteen years old, and the other children sat and listened to three hundred and fifty of their elders shot. All men and women over sixty were shot on that mountain overlooking the town, the one that reached so high toward heaven where God seemed lost in this very moment. Only did these shots seem to stop ringing in his ears when he watched his friends begin to die of starvation. So many of Jona’s own neighbors turned now on the Jews, ignorantly blaming the Jews for their long lives in poverty and giving up old friends to the soldiers’ bullets.

Children had the best chance of survival, and Jona’s mother and father knew this. They selflessly arranged for Jona and his brother’s safe passage across the Hungarian border, where they would find protection with their Hungarian cousins. Hungary had a deal with the Germans; all Hungarian Jews were granted survival as long as any non-Hungarian Jews were given back to the Nazis. And so Jona and his brother Avraham, two years his junior, were smuggled across the border into Hungary, passed for the Hungarian children they pretended to be. This one last selfless act of Jona’s parents would prove to be his life-saver. But for now, his mother and father with his older brother promised to meet Jona and Avraham in Hungary as soon as it was safe.

The young boys waited, and as time went on, their fear only grew with their hunger and their hope only died with their friends back at home. What they didn’t know was how much of home no longer existed. Every one of Jona’s classmates, aside from himself, would be killed in this atrocity. The fields, the synagogues, the Jewish cemeteries, every sign of the culture and religion he had always known slowly fell to ruins back at home. The season came for Jona’s parents to come for their boys, but as

they crossed the border, they were met by soldiers who sent them back. Did these soldiers know they were sending Jona's and so many other families to their gruesome deaths? How many were willing to even take a moment to question the horrors going on in the concentration camps right outside their towns? "The Germans were considered the most educated people in the world" and yet how could they be so ignorant as to believe in one man's words that the "final solution" to the world's problems lay at the deaths of six million Jews. But the Jews who entered the camps did know the truths of this atrocity, and Jona Goldrich's parents did know, but never had the chance to tell. After being sent back to Poland, Jona's family was forced into a concentration camp in Sambor. In time short enough, they were put in a line and shot down into mass graves like cans at a target practice by the Nazis.

Meanwhile, with no knowledge of his family's suffering at Sambor, Jona was in route to Palestine. Palestine's office in Budapest had granted fifty visas for Hungarian Jewish children to find safety in Palestine. Jona and his brother were among those blessed few who were given permission to survive. For six weeks, Jona traveled with his brother and forty-eight other children, many only toddlers. One guide for fifty hungry, scared children, and yet every one survived. For six weeks Jona traveled with the others, night and day; his brother Avraham was the only memory left of the safety and shelter he once knew. He did not know now if there was any hope left of seeing his missing loved ones, but he kept trekking on in faith that he would. Finally, after crossing many borders, Jona and the others found safety in Palestine.

Jona discovered new hope in Palestine. He and the other children were given a place at a Jewish agricultural school, where Jona found comfort in his studies, remembering his father's words. Jona and his brother had been finding new opportunity in Palestine for three months, when they met a survivor from the concentration camp in Sambor. This man told of how he suffered the witness of the murder of the boys' family. Fourteen-year-old Jona and his little brother would never know the arms of their father or the warmth of their mother's voice, nor the laughter of their brave older brother again. What was left of Jona and his brother when the Nazis had now taken all they had and all they loved? But Jona's father was right. The Nazis could not take everything from Jona as long as he still had his head, which he continued to hold up high.

And so Jona lived on to see the end of World War II; and so he lived through the struggle to see the birth of the new Jewish home of Israel. Eventually, he moved to America where he saw the birth of his two daughters and the birth of his own incredible achievements, like that of the Los Angeles Holocaust Monument. Fifteen years ago, Jona and Avraham journeyed back to their past to visit their childhood home in Poland, only to find any trace of their history destroyed and the tombstone's of their ancestors under other people's feet, just as the Nazis marched over them after using them to re-pave the streets. Five thousand Jews lived in Jona's hometown in Poland before the Holocaust, and only one thousand survived. There are no records of Jona Goldrich's childhood left. These records were all lost when his family was quickly forced from their home so many years ago. But Jona Goldrich lives today, an eighty-year-old Holocaust survivor, who still sometimes lies awake at night, wondering if he made it all up, for how could it have

really happened and the whole world just lie still and let it? I write Jona's story down today so that we may never forget the nightmare of the genocide of six million Jews and so that we may never let this nightmare be repeated.

Charlotte Huffstedder

By Sophia Lin and Dan Ovadia

From Yugoslavia to America: A Holocaust Survivor's Escape from the Nazis

Following World War I, a number of tiny, independent kingdoms including Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slavonia, and many others, formed the state of Yugoslavia--which literally translates to "Southern Slavs." These kingdoms united under King Alexander, who in 1934 was assassinated in France by a radical member of the Croatian Revolutionary Movement. King Alexander's son was too young to rule and the late King's cousin, Prince Paul, ruled Yugoslavia instead. The Prince panicked following the invasion of Poland and the collapse of France and therefore signed the Tripartite Pact, pledging cooperation with the Axis Powers; unfortunately, this led to his overthrow backed by the British government, and the young Prince Peter II became king. Backed by popular support he was vehemently against the Tripartite Pact and withdrew his support for the Axis Powers, leading to Germany's invasion and assimilation of parts of Yugoslavia. However, Germany allowed the anti-Semitic, right-wing Croatia to remain independent. The Croatians worked with the Nazis to terrorize the Balkan states.

Charlotte Huffstedder was born in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia in 1929 where her family rented a room to the Catholic Italian, Josip Moranduzzo. Only able to afford to take one child with him, he took Charlotte, the youngest of a family of six, with him to Split, an Italian controlled region. He passed her off as his daughter on the train ride to Split where she was in hiding with his family until Mussolini's demise in 1943. Around this time the Germans moved towards Split, leading a Jewish sympathizer to warn Josip and his family of impending German occupation. This led Josip to send Charlotte to a Jewish Community where she and several other Yugoslavian and German Jews hid for four months. Following this, she and the children were smuggled onto a ship where they were transported to Nonantola, Italy. Being half starved, Charlotte spent most of her time on board eating.

At Nonantola, she and the other children were sent to Villa Emma, an orphanage. She and the other children would often visit the ice cream parlor. Unfortunately, after a month, in June, the Germans began to wonder what the purpose of the large orphanage was, and Charlotte was once again forced to flee from the Nazis. A selfless priest warned Josef Indig, one of the children's caretakers, of German interest in the orphanage and he, along with a doctor and Josef, sent children under 14 years old to a convent. Those older than 14 were dispersed into homes in the town. The priest and doctor were later tortured for information on the children's whereabouts, which they did not disclose.

Shortly thereafter, the children at the convent marched to the train station in rows of four, singing German anti-Semitic songs. They took a train to Milano where the children dangled their feet off the edge of the platform as they waited. German guards

approached them, kicking them and questioning who they were, yet the terrified children remained silent. Taking a tiny four car train to the Swiss-Italian border, the children were stopped by two German soldiers. These soldiers let the children pass inspection after an eight year old German Jewish explained that they were fleeing the Nazis. At the border between Switzerland and Italy, there was a fence with pre-dug holes by British POWs, who had been fighting the Italians months before. The children crawled under the fence, using a passing train to disguise their sounds, and waited in the mountains until dark. As they waited, two German patrol guards passed within ten feet of them.

In order to reach safety, they needed to cross three rivers, two of which were shallow, the last one being extraordinarily deep. As the children crossed the last river, they were almost swept up in the current. They desperately clung to each other to prevent them from floating away by the surging currents while a director back on shore shouted for them to persist across the river. An old couple who had joined the expedition for refuge climbed atop a rock and began to plead for help. As the children waded across the river they caught sight of two guards in gray uniforms similar to those of the Nazi soldiers. The orphans, panicked, hurriedly began to swim back to shore, afraid they would be captured. The two soldiers, taking notice to the wading refugees began to yell, "Go back! Go away!" Caught in the terrifying pandemonium the children finally crossed the river and emerged soaking wet, screaming for their parents, who by now were probably dead.

The refugees were kept at the Swiss Guard camp for the two days of Rosh Hashanah, where the guards threatened to send any child who dirtied the bathrooms, back to Italy. The Israeli Brigade had arranged for the children to stay at a hotel once they arrived in Switzerland, but the guards refused to allow the refugees to use the phone to alert the hotel of their arrival. The Israeli Brigade had paid 75,000 lira for the escape of each child. The children were kept in quarantine for three weeks, after which they were sent to a hotel in Bex from January to May of 1945. They were crowded with other refugees, and no one at the hotel had any interaction with the Swiss in the neighboring village. Every Wednesday afternoon the children were marched to the movie theatre and back, all during a time when Swiss students were in school.

In May, the older children around ages 18 and 19 were put into arranged marriages and sent to the British controlled region of Israel. Charlotte however, being 15, was sent to St. Galen, a convent near the Swiss-German border which she did not like. Josef therefore arranged for her to be brought to Geneva where she stayed until 1947. During this course of events, Josip occupied Charlotte's old home in Yugoslavia. He forwarded postcards to her from her brothers in a concentration camp, though he didn't inform her family of her whereabouts. After her stay in Geneva, the Swiss government flew her back to Yugoslavia where she got typhoid fever and stayed in the hospital for four months. Charlotte Huffstedder's mother and father were both dead, killed early on after their capture. Her older brother perished along with her second oldest brother the day they were liberated from their camp, both killed by stray bullets. Her sister is still alive today, in Yugoslavia, where Charlotte herself worked in a hospital and met her husband, and in 1954 left for America.

Hanka Kent

By Gabrielle Gordon

A Story of Strength and Survival

The Holocaust unleashed inconceivable horrors to the Jewish people; many were thrown in the gas chambers, others were forced to watch loved ones get murdered; and lice, illness, and starvation were rampant among the filthy streets of Poland. Many Jews survived these horrors because of sheer luck and determination to survive. Hanka Kent is one of these brave individuals who learned to overcome the hatred and evils of humanity.

Hanka Kent was born March 1, 1930 in Chelm, a small, close-knit town in Poland. Hanka's family was religious, but her parents were also very modern. Hanka attended a Jewish school because anti-Semitism was rampant, and it would be unsafe for a Jewish child to attend a public school. Shabbat was a special time for the entire community, and memories of Shabbat remain vivid in Hanka's memory. Hanka's family stressed that it was her job to give to the poor on Shabbat, but most importantly, anonymous charity was the most valuable. Hanka believed that there was a special aura on Shabbat, and savory food could be smelled for miles. On Shabbat, it was Hanka's job to pluck the chicken. Hanka's mother would make sure that the chicken was Kosher, and if it wasn't, the chicken had to be returned to the butcher. On Saturday, every Jewish family would eat cholent, a dish made with potatoes, meat, barley, and stuffed neck. By the time Hanka was ten, she was able to make the entire Shabbat meal, just by observing her mother every Friday. When the weather permitted, the Jewish community would picnic in the woods. All of Hanka's Shabbat memories are warm and loving – Shabbat was truly a special time. Though Hanka's family lacked luxuries including a bathroom and electricity, Hanka could not imagine a happier childhood.

Every summer, Hanka stayed in Rejowiec with her grandfather. In 1939, when Hanka came home from Rejowiec, Hanka was sent to the pump to fetch water for her family. There was a square in the middle of the city where the Jews would talk politics. As Hanka stood in front of the water, she witnessed dozens of planes and bombs. Her family, fearful for their safety, left to live in the countryside until things settled down in Chelm; this is what they thought was the start of the war. Eventually, Russians came, and took over much of Poland, where there was much destruction. Hanka remembers that the Russians were generally good to them. The Russians brought tanks and bombs and established a Red Square, decked with ornaments and flowers. Many communist Jews had been arrested, and the Russians opened up the prisons and set many of these Jews free. Under the Russian occupancy, the people of Chelm were never hungry. Hanka was very happy because everyone was back in their own households, and life was pleasant without restrictions. After about six months, the Russians left because they made an agreement with Germany to leave Poland. When the Russians left after approximately six months, many Jews left with them. Hanka's family did not leave with these Jews because her family knew that if they went to Russia, the "closed casket," they would never be able

to reach their dream of Israel. Hanka's family remained optimistic, and her family knew that when the war was over, there was no question that they would immigrate to Israel.

When the Russians left, the pogroms began. The Poles decided to take revenge on the people who were left in Chelm, and as a result, Hanka's family went into hiding in a large closet. Hanka's mother pleaded for her father's life, and she managed to convince the Poles not to murder her father. Dozens of Jews were killed in Chelm because of these pogroms, and Hanka's father's store, among many others was smashed- with merchandise everywhere and broken windows.

Hanka remembered that her parents were overjoyed and thankful when the Germans occupied Chelm. Hanka and her family were hopeful, even though they had heard that the situation was terrible in Germany. Eventually, the Germans restricted the Jews to a ghetto, a specific part of the city. The Jews had curfew laws and were required to wear the Yellow Star. Hanka's family lived by the black market, because the Germans forced her father to close his shop, and they had no means of support. Hanka's father was rounded up one morning on Black Friday, never to be seen again. All of the men were sent to working camps, presumably Treblinka. Hanka's parents had said to her that there might be a time when they have to separate, but it was her responsibility to take care of her little sister until they were reunited again. When Hanka's father was taken away, it was a turning point in her life because she was cut off from communication.

Soon, the Germans began to take women and children. Hanka, her mother, and her three-year-old sister, Feigle, went into hiding in a cellar with about twenty other people. In the cellar, there was no food or water, and in desperation, the people drank urine. Hanka's mother went outside to get snow to drink and Hanka heard shots and realized that the Germans had killed her. Hanka took Feigle and escaped to her grandfather's town, about 15 kilometers away, because she thought her family was there. However, there was no one left in her family, but she still had friends in the city.

There was a ghetto, a sugar factory in the city. The ghetto was closed, and the people were not accepting newcomers. Hanka and her sister went into the ghetto and lived with a family illegally. Hanka cleaned for provisions daily. During the day, Hanka's little sister hid under the table so she wouldn't be seen. One of the girls, Esther, was a personal maid to one of the S.S. men, and she would get a lot of extra food. Esther told this S.S. man about Hanka's situation. The S.S. man came and visited, and he became like a friend to Hanka. One day, the S.S. man came with the barber and asked Hanka to fetch them some water. Hanka did not question this, and when she came back, her sister was dead. The S.S. man told Hanka that the entire ghetto was going to the concentration camp Majdanek, and this was the only chance of Hanka's survival. Hanka felt betrayed and could not stop crying. Hanka did not question this man's advice, hid in the cellar, and joined with the people without being counted or noticed.

In Majdanek, the women, men, and children were separated. Hanka was physically strong and very tall, and she was put with the workers. Daily, Hanka carried boulders across the camp, and repaired roads. S.S. women were in charge of the Jews,

and they guarded with German shepherd dogs. Though the German Shepherds were never released on Hanka, it horrified her to see the dogs let loose on other women. In Majdanek she would stand for hours being counted, wake up at four in the morning, and experienced her head being shaved. Majdanek was a dark period in Hanka's life. God's will allowed Hanka's survival, and at this time, she did not feel angry. Hanka had grown up in a very superstitious town, and they believed that everything in life is already decided. Hanka had the thought that her family was still alive and that was what kept her going day in and day out. From Majdanek, Hanka was shipped to Skarzysko Viamienue, an ammunitions factory. Once again, Hanka was alone and felt that she knew nothing about life. She literally survived on her rations. Hanka's job was to cut the steel part to fit on the submarine. Pieces of steel would fall on Hanka's leg and arms and burn her skin. Hanka was horrified because everyday the people were inspected, and she worried because of her scarred skin. The barracks were better in the factories than Majdanek, and the work wasn't worthless. Many of the women had communications with the men's division. Hanka had no communication with the men; she lived with her rations, just bread and soup. Hanka was taken to another ammunition factory, called Chestochona. Hanka befriended two sisters named Sala and Frieda, who in a sense adopted her. Hanka was the youngest wherever she went. One sister was engaged before the war, and the other sister was married.

From Chestochona, Hanka was taken to Bergen-Belsen, with Sala and Frieda, the worst experience yet. Hanka witnessed humans eating human flesh, and all Hanka could think about was food twenty four hours a day. Hanka vividly remembers as she stood in her blue-gray stripped uniform that if she could only have a piece of bread and a potato, she would be willing to die. At Bergen-Belson, Hanka saw her first crematorium. Death was always around the corner; when Hanka and the others were ushered into a building, they always wondered if water or gas would come out of the shower heads. Everyday, there were less people in the barracks. Hanka was withdrawn, and felt embarrassed to come from Chelm, when everyone else seemed to come from the large and sophisticated city of Warsaw.

After Bergen-Belsen, the people were evacuated and put into wagons. The railroad track was bombed, and the wagons couldn't move ahead because they were on the front line. The S.S. men had stopped feeding the Jews in the wagons. Frieda got very sick upon arrival at this new camp. Hanka was chosen to work in the kitchen. Hanka and the other workers were told that they would be killed if the Germans caught them smuggling food. Hanka wanted two potatoes, and it was stronger than her desire to live. Hanka stole two potatoes, and gave them to Freida though she desperately wanted them. Frieda felt that she owed her life to the two potatoes. Hanka had the feeling that only a miracle would keep her alive. Everyone only wanted to survive just one more day. At the time, Hanka didn't realize that she had the will to survive. They were sent to various camps, but two days later, whisked to a new camp. Rumors started that Americans and Russians were fighting, and a surge of hope was instilled in Hanka, and she felt that she might make it until the end of war. They went to Turkeim, and the Jews knew that the war was coming to an end. In Turkeim, there was a tremendous commotion, people were running frantically, and suddenly, they were told they were going to walk to Dahjow.

Hanka saw planes overhead as well as bombs. The S.S. started running, and Hanka was among a group of people who ran into the woods. The first night in the woods, Hanka and the others huddled as bullets whizzed past. Everyone drank the moisture from the leaves. Walked until they got to a house, knocked on the door and they went to a German household. They were very hospitable, the Germans gave them food and a place to sleep. It was the first time that they had a meal and a place to sleep. The Germans told them that they were liberated, and the Americans were there. Many lived in army barracks. Hanka did not know what she was going to do, because she had no family. Hanka felt like neither fish nor fowl, she was never with anyone her age. She never had anyone, and never felt that she belonged anywhere. Hanka felt elation and disbelief that she had survived.

Soon after the war, still in Turkeim, an epidemic of typhoid and typhus broke out. Hanka was taken to Bad Werishofen, a hospital. There was no room in the hospital, and no doctors. You had to survive thirteen days, and you would either survive or die. Hanka was in the hospital for several months. Sala and Freida befriended American soldiers, and helped nourish Hanka back to health. Both Sala and Freida found their fiancée and husband. Sala and Freida refused to leave without Hanka. While sick, Hanka hallucinated and felt that she should write down all of her experiences. Hanka was left to die; the doctors had given up on her. When Hanka was able to travel, Sala and Freida came to get Hanka. Hanka felt like a total misfit, everyone had family or was getting married. Hanka desperately wanted to go to Israel. Hanka found out there was a camp for displaced children, she ended up going to the United Nations Rehabilitation Association. They tried to make the children live like a family, and live normally. Each child was asked where they wanted to go to live. Hanka immediately said that she wanted to go to Israel, which didn't work out. She eventually ended up in America.

Hanka had a tremendous will to survive and pass her legacy on to make sure that this never happens again. Hanka no longer has the hate and anger that she once had. Hanka feels that her experiences and her life should be constructive if it is to have any meaning at all.

Hillel Krimalovski

By Ernestine Fu and Moshe Carmeli

The Life of Hillel Krimalovski, a Holocaust Survivor

On January 10, 1918, Hillel Krimalovski was born in Piotrkow, Poland to Tzipora and Ashar Krimalovski. He had three siblings – Sarah, Mirriam, and Benzion. At age six, Krimalovski and his family moved from Poland to Yaffa, Palestine (current day Israel). There, his mother was a housewife while his father was an advertisement designer, painting signs for local businesses. Exposed extensively to paint, his father Ashar soon died of lead poisoning when Hillel was only twelve years old. Later, in 1979, his mother died at the age of ninety-four.

In Yaffa, Palestine, Jewish life for the Krimalovski family was moderately religious as they attended the synagogue every Friday and Saturday, and celebrated all the Jewish religious holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Hanukkah, Purim, Pesach, Shavuot, and Tisha B'av. However, after Hillel's father died, the family stopped celebrating and observing Jewish occasions. Hillel himself, only went to synagogue for one more year to mourn his father's death.

During this time, there was an intense conflict in Palestine between the Jews and non-Jews as the Arabs insisted on attacking the Jews for "stealing their land." Thus, to protect the Jewish community, an organization – the Palmah – was established to unite and defend the Jews not only from the Arabs, but also from other forces. These included the Vichy government in Syria (a government which supported Nazi Germany), the Nazi supporters in Iraq, and later on, the English.

As the Nazis rose to power, Hillel began losing his family. Although they were no longer very religiously observant, the Nazi forces seized and murdered Hillel's relatives one by one, from his aunts to his uncles to his cousins. As they were killed, the Krimalovski family property was also confiscated.

Noticing that he needed to himself, Hillel, in his mid-twenties, decided to take action. He found out about the Palmah through a volunteer group at high school. Deciding to join, he was given instructions to go to his kibbutz. There, a lady wrote down his contact information. A few days later, in the June of 1941, he was given confidential instructions to meet at a hidden location near an obscure lake. There, he met a Palmah officer along with a cluster of other young recruits. The officer explained that the Nazis' power had escalated, as they were already invading Africa and fighting the English in various cities of Africa. Since the larger cities of Egypt were only a one-day drive and a short crossing through the Suez Canal from Palestine, they needed to prepare for an attack, especially because the Nazis intended to conquer the lands of the Middle East from Africa. Fortunately, Field Marshal Bernard successfully defeated the Nazi forces

that were led by Erwin Rommel in El Alamein, and thus ended the Nazi expansion in Africa.

Had the Nazi forces successfully conquered Egypt, the Palestinians were almost certain to fall to the escalating power of Hitler and Nazi Germany, as Egypt had a weak sense of cooperation and a smaller, less powerful military unit than the overwhelming might of the Nazis, who had recruited numerous individuals from the vast lands they held.

But Hillel knew that the threats and danger were not over. Consequently, he became a devoted driver and soldier for the organization. He was first assigned to Squad A, and then he joined the English invasion of Syria in the reconnaissance, searching, and bombing of the Vichy government (which was fighting in defense of Nazi Germany) alongside the English forces.

The Vichy Government was originally controlled by the French. Although the French had already given up their control of this region, which they had obtained from World War I, they still kept their rights to maintain forces and airfields within this area. Then, in 1941 the Paris Protocols were signed, granting Hitler and Nazi Germany the power to access and manipulate these pre-French controlled bases.

Further motivated by his success in Syria, he willingly complied when he was promptly assigned to the Haifa region of the Palmah. There, on one of his many operations, Hillel was traveling through the region, transporting supplies, when he was suddenly stopped by a group of heavily armed English troops. Despite the fact that he had fought on the English side, once the British had stopped the Nazis from invading Africa, they now turned against the Jews, stating that they could not have independent operations and hold weapons. Thus, the troops promptly arrested Hillel for carrying military supplies such as grenades and ammunition, he was taken to the jail of Acco, and he was sentenced to three years of prison. However, after being held for three weeks, Hillel requested an appeal. He was granted a bail out until the court date; however, after paying it, he jumped bail, escaping to southern Palestine. He was transferred to Platoon 5 of the Palmah in Negvah. There, he changed his identity to Nachum Berrenstein to avoid being caught once again by the English.

In southern Palestine, he stayed in a kibbutz that had a wide, open view of the only road that led there. The security watchman of the place informed all the residents to take shifts, watching out for approaching foreign vehicles that might contain policemen who wanted to seize Nachum. Nachum was instructed to hide in a barn if any such persons were to approach. Thus, Nachum stayed in relative obscurity and peace for some time.

However, as the police began to catch up with him, Hillel appeared on the “Most Wanted” criminals list because of his failure to attend the hearing and his affiliation with the Palmah. He was to be held in prison for five years if caught. His picture was posted all over Palestine in numerous English police stations as he was considered a terrorist and

thus a major threat to the English. Sensing a growing urgency, Hillel, in order to further conceal his identity, changed his name once more – to Nachum Carmeli. Also, physically, he grew a beard and let his hair grow. Nachum remained hiding in southern Palestine for six more months, but then returned to activity when, in 1947, he was ordered to report to Aliyah 2 in Italy and France for some secret Palmah operations.

The Palmah wanted Nachum to design ships to transport World War II survivors, especially Jews whose homelands were being devastated, from Europe to Palestine. This was an extremely illegal job as, the English, in their conquest for world domination, had taken over Palestine, holding power and refusing to allow the Palmah to carry out their duties and operations. More importantly, the English didn't want any refugees from Europe entering Palestine.

Ignoring the dangers, the Palmah continued their operations. Their ships contained compartments under deck for these refugees, and they successfully transported many people and dispersed them amongst various villages and kibbutzim.

Nachum's duty was to design the ships. This job, not as dangerous as his previous ones, was assigned to him by the Palmah's higher ranked officers because they thought it was to Nachum's best interests to operate this relatively obscure job. The officers thought that if Nachum was to help transport dangerous, illegal weapons again, he was likely to be caught again, and the penalty would be much more severe – execution.

Thus, assigned to this relatively low profile job, Nachum effectively created a floor plan to maximize the number of refugees that could hide below the deck. He designed levels, compact in height, for these migrants to hide in during the day.

Then, in April 1948, Nachum was assigned to yet another post. He became the Captain of the Third Company of the Iftah Battalion and joined the War of Independence for the state of Israel. After a victory in November 1948, he returned to his kibbutz after the Palmah was dissolved.

Nachum was legally freed from his illegal crimes, as his case was closed in October 1948 when the United Nations formed the independent country of Israel. And, a cancellation was sent to all the police stations to cancel all orders of arrest during the extraction of English troops from Israel.

In later reflections of what had occurred, Nachum realized that, largely by his father's actions of moving the family to Palestine, he, his mother, and his siblings were barely saved from almost certain death in the hands of the Nazis. If they had stayed in their native city of Piotrkow, the Nazis would have captured and taken them to one of the many nearby concentration camps. Yet, unfortunately, despite his valiant actions, Nachum's father soon died. However, unquestionably, he would have been proud to know that his son – Nachum took on the fight against the cruel injustice of the Nazis, and succeeded.

Paula Lebovics

By Samantha Haley Simons

In Fire and In Flame

Denied by some and unimaginable to most, the events of the Holocaust affected the lives of generations. In history books, documentaries, and even first-hand conversations, we are confronted with the atrocities committed by fellow man during a time when human cruelty was at its peak. But despite their attempts to wipe diversity off the map, these races and religions still thrive, and the victims of these crimes will not be silenced. They continue to tell their stories to ensure that the past will not be forgotten.

Paula Lebovics, formerly known as Pessa Balter, was born in 1933 in the town of Ostrowiec, Poland. The youngest of six children, Paula was raised by parents Israel and Perla Balter in a building owned by her grandfather until 1940. It was then that her family was forced to move into a small and overcrowded ghetto, simply because she was Jewish. Paula's oldest brother, Herschel, was aware of the danger lying ahead of them, and without them knowing, he constructed an underground hideout when it came time for the selections. Over time, he saved the lives of dozens of family members and friends who came to hide when the SS men came around to find people to take to concentration camps. However, two of Paula's sisters neglected to hide, thinking that they would be safe because they had proper work papers. They were taken to Treblinka and never seen again.

Eventually, the ghetto became so unsafe that Paula and her brother, Yosef, went into hiding during the daytime. They took refuge near a brick factory and when Yosef left her alone to join the workers, Paula became frightened and decided that she too could join the work force. But Paula was captured by a Ukrainian soldier, where she had her first of many near-death experiences. While the soldier went in search of a German official, Paula spotted her mother in a group of women nearby. The women tried to hide her, but the soldier caught on and beat the women in the group until he found Paula again and threw her against a wall, knocking her unconscious. When Paula woke up, the man began to strangle her, and demanded that she tell him where other Jews were hiding, threatening to shoot her if she did not comply. Paula told the soldier that she did not know of any places where people may have been hiding. Her only plea was that if he did not find anyone, he would let her see her mother and father one more time. He searched, but found no one. At the age of seven years old, Paula was told to turn around so she could be shot. But she refused, holding him to his promise and begging him to let her see her parents. At that moment, she met the man she refers to as her "Guardian angel in an unexpected form." He was a drunken SS man who stumbled over to the soldier, laughing and shouting.

"Don't waste the bullet," said the drunk, "She'll be dead soon anyway."

And with that, the soldier lowered his gun and spared her life.

For about a year and a half, Paula became a worker in the Hard Labor Camp around age nine. She performed grueling tasks and chores not meant for young children, such as loading wagons with bricks and scrap metals for the steel mill in the heat of the summer and even working in the Hitler Youth Camp with the remaining children. However, in the beginning of August in 1944, the Germans liquidated Ostrowiec Hard Labor Camp, and whatever workers were left were immediately sent to Auschwitz. For a trip that normally would have taken two hours, the children were left in a heavily packed cattle car for two whole days, with little food and no fresh air. However, these children were among the fortunate; because they had come with a child work camp, they were exempt from the usual selections upon arrival. If they had arrived under any other circumstances, they would have been immediately sent to the gas chambers.

But this newfound lucky streak did not last long. Like every other prisoner, Paula was shaved, tattooed, given only a small shirt to wear, and placed in a cramped barrack with even more cramped bunks (barely holding six people). One day when all of the women were in the barrack, one of them asked Paula to sing to them. Encouraged by many, Paula got up on an adjacent riser and sang in front of nearly a thousand people the first song that came to mind, without fully understanding what it meant. She sang in Hebrew a song called “Eli Eli” (My God, My God):

“My God, why have you forsaken us?
In fire and in flame they burned us,
But we did not want to leave you, oh God.
Help us, save us.”

Meanwhile, the head of the barrack heard her voice, and took her to sing for the camp officials. For a brief period of time, she was given proper care and clothing before she was moved to the children’s barrack (E7) in the gypsy camp. There, each day they were visited by Dr. Mengele, the infamous self-proclaimed doctor who performed countless medical experiments on victims of the Holocaust, particularly children. Every time he came he took multiple children, the majority of which never came back. At an early age, Paula taught herself to “be invisible.” This survival instinct trained her to never make eye contact and always act inconspicuous. Nevertheless, this skill could still present challenges in certain situations. On his last visit before liberation, he came to the children’s barrack and asked the children to form a circle around him, proposing an offer no child could refuse. He offered them the chance to be reunited with their families. Many jumped at the chance, and for a split second, Paula almost took him up on it. After quickly thinking it through, she had thoroughly convinced herself that he was lying, and narrowly escaped his trap. A few days later they found the bodies of those who did not.

Towards the end of the war, word had spread that her brother Herschel was alive and in barrack D8 in the men’s camp, just across the wires from where she was being held. They were so close, they could wave at each other and even sometimes exchange words. One day he told her that their mother was sick and in the hospital barrack, located

close to where she was staying. Somehow he was able to get some food across the electric wired fence to Paula, and she snuck out to the hospital to give it to her.

On January 18, 1945, all camps of Auschwitz were emptied for the Death March, leaving only the children and hospital patients. The SS men came back for the sick, and soon after they were gathered, the Russians came and stopped them. For ten days, the children in Barrack E7 were left without food or supplies. Paula managed to find some old bread that kept her alive, and once the Russians bombed the electric wired fence, she and the others took clothes from a nearby storage room. On January 27 the Russians, shocked by the devastation they found, liberated Auschwitz and burned down the barracks that once held so much pain.

Paula and her mother were reunited after the liberation of Auschwitz, and managed to go back to their hometown of Ostrowiec. However, their safety in the town was short-lived, when news spread of the massacre of ten survivors by the Polish Commando. Paula and her mother ran away quickly to Lodz, a populated city in Poland where someone took mercy on them and gave them a place to sleep. Later after the war was over her two surviving brothers found them through the Red Cross. Because Poland was becoming a Communist country under Russian control, the family decided to move to Germany and ended up in a displaced person's camp. Paula's brothers separated from them, one moving to Palestine and the other to Australia, and a surviving uncle took in her and her mother until 1951. During this period, Paula went to school for the first time at the age of twelve, and learned her basic studies as well as Hebrew, English, and the piano. At the end of 1951, Paula registered for the United States, and six weeks later she and her mother left for America. There she lived in Detroit, Michigan, where she met her husband, and sadly, where her mother died of pancreatic cancer. Paula and her husband moved to California soon after to raise their family there.

Paula Lebovics is completely aware of just how fortunate she is. She speaks for the one and a half million children who were murdered and forever silenced. Last year, Paula went with 79 students on the March of the Living, a program that takes Jewish teenagers and Holocaust survivors to multiple concentration camps in Poland, along the path taken for the Death March years ago. She continues to tell her story because she believes that "Silence is not an option." Paula keeps the memories alive of those the world lost, and gives undeniable proof that will be passed down, l'dor va'dor, from generation to generation. She is in every way a true survivor.

David and Eva Lenga

By Jillian and Rebecca Elbaum

After a long week of high school finals, we made an arrangement to meet with Holocaust survivors, David and Eva Lenga. We were instantly moved by their young appearance and warm personalities. They invited us in and Eva shared her Holocaust experience. She told us that “her husband’s story was worse than hers.” However, for us it was just as important. After Eva’s parents were taken away, a family friend brought her from the Swedish Consulate a fake ID to conceal her Jewish identity. Eva was then taken to a convent in Budapest, run by nuns, and was hidden in the attic with 30 other young Jewish girls. The nuns taught them about Christianity, so that when the Germans came they were able to answer questions about their “religion”. She told us that when she was required to go to Confession, she would make up sins because she knew that she did not have any. During a Russian air raid, the attic of the convent was destroyed and all of the children in hiding were moved down to the cellar. Before Eva would even allow David to tell his story, Eva insisted that we join them for tea and cake. Because food was so scarce during the war, they made a comment to us that every event must include food to share, emphasizing their value of food.

David was 11 years old when the war started living a prosperous Jewish life in Lodz, Poland. His father owned a successful tannery 18 kilometers away from their home. David and his younger brother, Nathan, attended the same elementary school, which had many Jewish students. There were always many family gatherings of 100 people or more, discussing political events in their home. On September 1, 1939, David was in 8th grade, when the German army stormed Poland, and occupied his city of “Lodz “. Shortly, proclamations were posted banning Jews from schools and businesses. Their Christian neighbors whom they considered friends reported them to the Gestapo and they had to begin wearing yellow stars on their arms.

One evening the Gestapo knocked on the Lenga’s family door and informed them that their father’s tannery now belonged to the Germans. They were told that they must take their personal possessions and move to the town of Strykow where the tannery was located. This was the beginning of what would become Ghetto life for Jews, with a scarcity of food and harsh living conditions. David’s father, Abraham, continued to run the tannery with supplies being provided by the Germans. David’s father must have been a smart man for he knew that by asking the Germans for double the amount of workers than was actually needed, he could save a larger number of Jewish lives. In 1942, David’s father became terribly sick with pneumonia, and as the Russian army came closer to the region, the Germans no longer had need for the tannery. The family was separated and David’s father was taken away. David thought that he would never see his father again. David, his brother, and his mother were transported back to the ghetto in Lodz, where he found his aunt and uncle.

This ghetto was a slave labor ghetto where everyone worked no matter the age or physical ability of the person. If someone was physically unable to work, the Germans simply shot them. Dead bodies were strewn throughout the streets because of the starvation and hunger that people suffered. David's mother, Sarah, knew the fate of children and insisted that his uncle apprentice him in becoming a skilled tailor at age 14. David caught on quickly and this trade ended up saving his life many times throughout his Holocaust experience. In 1942, SS soldiers raided the ghetto and separated the people into groups of able-bodied men and women, and children and the sick. The group of children and sick destined for the concentration camp included David and his brother. Not wanting to leave her children knowing their fate, David's mother volunteered herself to go with the children. However, David's uncle, a prominent figure in the ghetto, pulled strings to save David because he was an able-bodied tailor. While in the holding room, David heard his name called by a Jew appointed to supervise the children. He told David to run home where he found his aunt and uncle. He asked where his mother was and the aunt replied that she went out to look for him. He soon came to realize that his mother and brother were never coming back. In the following two years David became suicidal because for a 14 year old boy, there was nothing to live for any longer.

After two years of working in the Ghetto, the Germans decided to dissolve the ghetto because the Russians were closing in. The Germans were transporting all of the Jews to concentration camps, but David resisted, went into hiding. He was hoping for liberation and did not want to die under the hands of the Germans. Now he was living in an abandoned building completely alone scavenging for food at night to sustain himself. While hiding in the building, he could hear Germans walking around outside searching for signs of life. David tried to cook himself some warm water without realizing that the Germans could see smoke coming from the top chimney of the building. With his developing street smarts, David tore away a wooden plank from the attic wall, to find himself a hole in the wall barely large enough to squeeze in, in the event of a search. One night, David heard German soldiers and dogs coming up the stairs to his room. He hid in the hole; his heart stopped and was barely breathing. The soldiers broke down the walls with their bayonets narrowly missing David on each side of him. David remained in the hole all night until he was certain that the soldiers were gone.

In the morning David awoke to the sound of Polish and Yiddish speaking voices outside. He peered through a hole and saw a large group of the White Guard, prisoners appointed to clean up the abandoned ghetto. David decided that this was his only way of escaping the ghetto. By grabbing a broom and blending in with the White Guard, David received food and accompanied them on a train back to Germany. On a horrible ride in cattle cars, the train finally stopped at Auschwitz. Again, laborers were weeded out to be sent to Germany to work in slave labor camps, and again David was not chosen. He came face to face with Mengele, the infamous Nazi doctor, who decided if he would live or die. He came twice around and each time Mengele refused him passage to be saved. David's street smart came in handy again. He saw two men carrying food to the selected prisoners, and David joined them in carrying the food to the fenced off holding area, where he promptly blended in with the people there, and therefore saving himself. Because the Germans kept exact count of their selected prisoners, who were destined to

go to the German labor camps, David pushed forward to the front of the line to insure that he would be saved because one extra person was not allowed. David knew that because he saved himself, he had taken the place of another, but he was willing to do anything to survive.

From Auschwitz David traveled to another horrible labor camp in Bavaria. There he came under the supervision of a French Jew who became his surrogate father. David then fell deathly ill and it seemed like there was no hope left for him, but the French Jew nursed him back to health, giving him a new sense of hope and will to live. Now in good health, he pleaded with the Capos , (the camp foremen) to allow him to use his tailoring skills to make them warm clothing for the winter. The Capos agreed, and again his tailoring skills saved him. Then he was chosen to go with a crew to work on the railroad. One day David was approached by SS soldiers who were in dire need of a smoke. The stationmaster, an old man, had a supply of tobacco leaves in the attic of his house, and the soldiers asked him to steal tobacco from the stationmaster's house in exchange for bread. David was willing to do anything for food in order to stay alive.

It is 1944, close to the end of the war, and now the concentration camps are being dissolved. Everyone at the labor camp is packed onto a train heading for Bergen-Belsen to be murdered in the gas chambers. On the way, the train stopped in a thick forest while a military train stopped right next to them in the opposite direction. Suddenly, American air planes spotted the trains, and swooped down; shooting at the German military train, not realizing that the other train had Jewish prisoners. Although many tried dodging the bullets, horrendous slaughter was still taking place. Soldiers and prisoners jumped out of the train to try to hide in the forest. As the Americans realized that most were prisoners, they stopped shooting.

David fell asleep in the forest, huddled together with the other prisoners in the rain and cold. In the morning, the German soldiers had fled, afraid of the Americans. The German train remained in the forest full of the food that they were keeping for themselves. By smashing cans together they were able to open the canned food. Because they had not eaten in so long, and were very emaciated, and eating too much of this rich, fat food killed most of them. David and his two friends were unable to open any cans and actually saved their lives by not eating.

They knew the direction of the Allies and walked toward the front. On the way they stopped at a German farmer's hut. A soldier was guarding in front and would not let David and his friends in. So David and his friends started to move on. All of a sudden they heard the farmer calling them back and told them that the soldiers were leaving soon and they could hide in the barn. The farmer's wife came to them and fed them fresh doughnuts and warm milk and told them that they were safe. David told us that the farmer and his wife were so nice to them because they did not want to be arrested by the Allies, proving that they actually saved the Jews...

A few days later, on May 5, 1945, American tanks pulled into the farm. David could not understand their language but a Yiddish speaking army officer from Brooklyn

explained that the war was over and they were liberated. From there they were taken to a liberation camp where they could search for family and adjust back into society. He could not find any family in Germany, and decided to go to Sweden. It was there that he eventually was reunited with his father, his only relative who survived. His father chose to live in Israel and died there at the age of 90 in 1990.

David, who was already married, with two children, remained in Sweden. He and his family, stayed there up until the Korean War and then made a decision to come to America. He became a successful designer.

All four of us took a deep breath as David told us about his life in Sweden and beginning a new chapter of his life. David and Eva's story inspired us because of their positive attitude toward everything and ability to live happily after emerging from a horrible crisis in their lives. Their story should never be forgotten so that we can insure that the Holocaust will never happen again.

From Horror to Freedom

Hedy Adler was born on April 13th, 1926 in Reteag, Hungary. Reteag was a small agricultural town with about 120 Jewish families. Hedy's parents' names were Samuel and Helen, and she had two brothers named Fred and Dodo. Unfortunately, Dodo died when he was one and a half years old from pneumonia. Hedy was the youngest of the three. Samuel owned a large lumberyard and operated a winery. Her family was wealthy and valued education, but Reteag had only one school which went up to the seventh grade. At age 10, Hedy and her brother Fred were sent to a school in Dej and stayed with their uncle. Dej was a big city that was eight miles away from Reteag. The transition was difficult for Hedy. She was very attached to her parents and hated being away from them. She studied in Dej year-round and returned home for school breaks. She studied in Dej until she was 14. To continue her education, Hedy moved to Gherla to live with her aunt. Unfortunately, things didn't work out in Gherla, so at age 15, Hedy moved to Cluj to attend a Jewish high school.

Before the war started, Hedy and her family were orthodox Jews. Every Friday night, Helen would set the table with candles and flowers, and they would celebrate Shabbat. On Passover, they would eat matzah and chremsel. On May 3rd 1944, early in the morning police officers came banging on their door. The police told them they were to pack their belongings and come with them in an hour. Hedy and her family were sent to a ghetto in the Bungher Forest. The ghetto housed 8,000 Jews and Hedy remembers the ghetto being, "very, very uncomfortable." There was little food and people were getting sick and were starving. Hedy remembers non-Jewish family friends bringing them food and Samuel refusing to eat it because it was not kosher. One day, Fred and one of his friends were planning to escape the ghetto. Samuel pleaded with Hedy to go with them but Hedy refused to leave her parents because she thought that if her parents were sent to a concentration camp they would need her help.

On June 3rd 1944, Hedy and her family left the ghetto on a train. For three days and three nights she was crammed in a train car with no light. On the morning of June 6th, the train stopped. Nobody knew where the train was going, but I'm sure nobody expected that they would end up where they did; the death camp of Auschwitz. When she got off the train, the men and women were separated into two different lines. Little did Hedy know she would never see her father again. Hedy spent several months in the camp. She was tattooed and slept in a wooden bunk with four other women and not one blanket. Hedy felt as if she had lost her identity. On January 18th 1945, the Nazis evacuated the camp and took everyone on a "Death March". She walked for two and a half days carrying her mother, Helen, because she was so sick. Hedy ended up in Ravensbruck two days later. At this point, Hedy felt hopeless and "didn't feel like a human anymore." They were once again put on another train and sent to a concentration

camp named Neustadt – Glewe. On May 2nd 1945, the American Army liberated the camp. A week later on May 9th, Helen died.

After the war, Hedy returned to Cluj to meet up with her brother Fred, who evaded the camps. Fred did not know that Helen had died, and when Hedy told him, he started to cry. Hedy was depressed and it was painful for her to return to Reteag without her parents. She remained in a state of depression until she met Ted Ordentlich. It was literally “love at first sight.” At the party where they had met, Ted turned to Hedy and told her he wanted to marry her. On February 24th 1946, Ted and Hedy were married and have now been married for 62 years. They have three daughters named Martha, Judy, and Helen, and eleven grandchildren. They expressed tremendous gratitude to this country and greatly appreciate the opportunities that they have been given in the United States.

Hedy, as well as any survivor, is an inspiration to us all. Hedy told me to always believe in myself. She said, “Sometimes life is hard but you have to have faith in yourself.” If Hedy endured something as horrifying as the holocaust, we all can withstand any challenge that we face in life. When I have a problem, I will always think of Hedy’s words and believe in myself.

Jeanine Strauss

By Karen Shein

"It Was a Frightening Time"

Jeanine Strauss was born in 1936 in Belgium. Her father was a salesman, and her mother was a homemaker, who took care of their big family. Jeanine had four sisters and one brother, making a total of six children in the family. Her three older sisters were born in Germany, but because of the conditions that the Jewish people had to live under with the Nazis, her parents decided to leave Germany before Jeanine was even born. Her parents went straight to still unoccupied Belgium, and there they moved the family around a lot, always trying to find a better place for them to live.

In 1942, Jeanine's eldest sister, Ruth, who was sixteen at the time, was called on by the Nazis to go to a "work camp." Jeanine still remembers her father taking her sister to the train and her mother crying, while all her siblings watched as Ruth left them forever. While her parents knew what was happening to Ruth, Jeanine did not understand at the time why her sister had to leave.

Meanwhile, the family was in constant fear, always moving. To Jeanine as a young girl, "it was a frightening time." She remembers her parents talking about how some of their friends were committing suicide. One of their friends just jumped out of a window so he could escape the concentration camps. From their house, Jeanine's family could see trucks picking up Jews around the city. The family would climb through a window to get out of the house just so the Nazis would not see them and take them away. Jeanine remembers going to the park for hours on different days to escape the rounding up of their Jewish neighbors.

Shortly after, Jeanine's parents decided it was time to find hiding spaces for the younger children. Her mother knew the sister of someone who worked at a grocery store and trusted her to hide Jeanine. Jeanine was only five years old at the time when her parents told her that she would be leaving home. When the new woman came to see Jeanine for herself, Jeanine was skeptical and "didn't like the looks of this woman." Due to the fact that it must have been an incredibly traumatic experience for her, Jeanine blocked out from her memory the actual separation from her parents. All she remembers is that her older sister took her by train to the Slegers, the new family she would be living with. The Slegers family was Catholic and consisted of the mother, father, and their daughter, who was seventeen at the time and also happened to have the name Jeanine. The Slegers, for the most part, were very kind to her. She recollects the doll she received for her sixth birthday, which is the only toy she remembers ever having. While Jeanine became pretty close to the father and daughter, she was not as close with the mother. The mother used to make Jeanine get on her knees in front of the cross if she lied. Although she did go to church regularly, Jeanine knew she was Jewish, and her parents made the Slegers promise that she would not be converted to Catholicism.

Living with the Slegers, Jeanine grew accustomed to bombings all the time. They would run to ditches outside and eventually found an underground vault they could go to. There was a factory across the street that was bombed, and one time when they got back to their house, it was completely destroyed. Years later, once Jeanine was already married with kids, they went to look at mines and Jeanine was unable to look into the hole. Another instance occurred when they emptied the pool, and Jeanine could not look inside it. She found this odd until the Slegers came to visit her in California and told her that the bombing had left a big hole in place of their house, and Jeanine finally realized why she had a phobia of pits.

The Slegers moved to Brussels and Jeanine could no longer stay with them. She was put into a convent and lived on a farm for months. After the convent, Jeanine was taken to a Jewish home, but only spent a couple of months there. At this time, she was already seven and a half years old. Jeanine was not happy at the Jewish home so she was transferred to another place. There she lived with other orphan children for two and a half years. The staff at this place was rather harsh on the kids. She remembers once when she wet the bed, the staff made her wear the wet sheets to breakfast for everyone to see. If any of the children lied, they were put into a pitched black cellar. There was a little bit of schooling at the “orphanage” and this was the first time Jeanine received any sort of education.

While Jeanine was living with the Slegers, her brother, Joe, lived with another family not too far from her. When Jeanine was transferred to the home for orphans, her brother was too, but did not stay there for long. The family he had been living with had children who were already grown so they wanted to keep Joe. Hedi, one of Jeanine’s older sisters lived in Brussels at this time in a home for teenagers. She would come visit Jeanine, and during one of the visits, she informed Jeanine that their parents had been taken with two of their younger sisters to Auschwitz.

While Jeanine was living with the other orphans, her sister, Hedi, made contact with their father’s brother, Max. In 1947, the uncle got papers together to have Hedi, Jeanine, and Joe come to the United States. The three of them went from Belgium to Paris, where they spent a night. Joe, who was only nine years old at the time, tried to escape that night they were in Paris, but Jeanine and Hedi got him back. It took about a week for them to reach the United States, specifically New York. They were kindly welcomed by their uncle’s family, which included their uncle, his wife, and their two kids. Jeanine and her brother shared a room, while Hedi shared a room with their cousin. Jeanine was ten years old when they came over and started in the fifth grade. She ended up living there for eleven years.

She met her husband, a survivor of a concentration camp, in New York on a blind date, and they eventually moved to California, where they had two sons. When the boys were little, Jeanine and her husband did not want to talk about their experiences in the Holocaust. It was not until the children were much older that Jeanine and her husband shared their stories.

Nowadays, Jeanine still keeps in touch with the Slegers daughter, Jeanine. The Slegers came to visit in 1976, and Jeanine took them to her temple for services, where they were recognized as righteous gentiles. Jeanine's sister, Hedi, got married, lived in Baltimore, and had two sons. Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and passed away in 1999. Her brother, Joe, is her only sibling still alive and lives in New York. Jeanine says she has no desire to go to Auschwitz to see where much of her family was murdered. While she often feels a sense of guilt for having survived while the rest of her family was killed, she has tried to come to peace with what happened and live a happy life full of family, friends, and her art.

Assemblymember Sally Lieber
District 22



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Faina Paverman

Interviewed by Patricia & Inna Barilko

Faina Paverman

By Patricia and Inna Barilko

Faina Paverman is a remarkable woman who lived through a regime of terror and hate to tell her story. She now lives in California, but her story took place in Ukraine, when it was still part of Soviet Russia. World War II had started and the Nazis were attacking everywhere. Faina tells the story of how she and her family survived during a time of great hardship.

Faina was born in 1929 in Kiev to a loving mother, father, and brother four years her elder. They lived in Kiev until Faina was three, and then they moved to Mariupol, Ukraine, where Faina grew up. Her father worked as a quality assurance inspector in a steel mill called Azovstal, or literally, “river of steel.” Her mother was a mid-wife in the local hospital and was stationed in the birthing ward. Faina and her brother attended school regularly and received high marks. Even though their passports had a fifth line that stated they were Jewish, they did not practice the religion, as was expected of everyone in the USSR. Faina’s family had good relations with their neighbors and lived a normal life in the city.

When the Second World War came to the Ukraine, no one really expected it to overtake the whole country. Everyone thought that the Russian army would deal with the Nazis before they reached their town or their city. As a cautionary measure, however, a few cities, like Mariupol, dug trenches in order to stop the tanks that may try to attack the city. Faina’s brother and father helped dig one of the trenches outside of the city, and were sure that the Nazis couldn’t get past it because the Russian army would take care of the trouble long before those trenches would be used. However, the Nazis came quickly and brutally; they attacked from land, sea, and air.

When the Nazi army started to come close to Mariupol, her father knew about it because the factory he was working in was being evacuated by sections. The army would not come upon any weapon parts they would be able to use. Faina’s family started to gather their things because they received a notification to prepare to leave any day. A few days after that, on October 8th, 1941, Faina, twelve, walked outside to go to school, and saw men on motorcycles coming down the street and gunning down anyone who was in their path. The War had begun in Mariupol.

In the next hours, notifications were sent out all over the city for all Jews to gather their valuables and meet in a designated area. A yellow star was given to each person, and all were forced to wear it. They were told that they would be brought to a place where they would work. Everyone knew that this would be a ghetto. On the 18th of October, Faina’s family and the others went to the place where they would now reside, which turned out to be an abandoned soldier’s barracks. Everyone was kept there without food or drink. They would be followed at gun point by the guards even when they went to relieve themselves. After two days, everyone was gathered again and they were walked

outside of the city, to the trenches that were supposed to prevent the coming of the army that now had guns pointed at their backs.

When they reached the trenches, the Nazis told the people to undress and put all their clothes in a pile. At that point, all of the Jews realized that they were to be shot and that the trenches were to be their graves. Faina's father did not want to see his family die, so he went to the front of the mass of people. He was one of the first to be shot and he was killed right before the eyes of his wife and children.

As evening approached, Russian planes started to fly overhead and scared the Nazi army. They decided to leave, and took their Jewish prisoners to an abandoned barn for cows, which was very long and had an exit on either end. The people were left there for the night again, without any food or drink. Everyone knew that they were to be shot the next morning. The young people, however, became very agitated at the thought, and decided to try to escape. There was only one guard circling the barn, and whenever he was at one end, people would open the door slightly, slip through, and run. The mentality was that it didn't matter if you were going to be caught and shot in the back; you were going to die tomorrow anyway.

Faina's brother was one of the people who took it up in his mind to try to escape. He attempted to convince his very weak mother and Faina to escape as well, and after a time, he succeeded. Faina and what was left of her family gathered their strength, and when the opportunity came, they took it and ran out into the cold and raining night. They were outside of their city and lost; they didn't know where to go, and didn't know who to turn to. They walked until they found a house, and desperately hoped that there would be someone in there who could help them. A woman answered the door, but instantly warned them that Nazis' were occupying her home, and it was not safe to stay there. Faina and her family asked for directions to Mariupol and the woman pointed in a direction. As that was their only place to go, they started to walk, with no food or drink in almost 3 days, in that direction for the whole night.

Near the morning, they stumbled into their apartment complex, and knocked on their neighbors' door. The neighbors answered, but it was the same answer again. The Nazis had not only occupied their apartment, but also took over all of the empty ones, including the one Faina and her family lived in. The soldiers were out for the time being, however, and were able to give the family food and drink. With nowhere to go, they decided to head to Rostov, a large city in Russia, where they would hopefully be safe.

They walked for two weeks and stayed in villages overnight, but never for long because the Nazis were always there. At the beginning of the third week however, Faina was separated from her mother and her brother during a heavy bombardment. She had no choice but to assume they were dead and to continue on, alone and now lost. She walked in the direction they were following and came across the Donets River that she had to cross, but there were no bridges or walkways across, so she had to swim across. She became very sick, but continued on, but that trip across the river left her with chronic bronchitis for the rest of her life.

Eventually she reached Rostov on the 7th of November, but everyone there was already getting ready to leave; the city changed hands constantly and everyone anticipated another take over of the city. Faina asked for the nearest refugee camp, but everyone said it was no use since everyone was leaving in the next few days. However, while she was there, she was interviewed by a reporter, who took down her story in full, because she had no one else to tell it to. It was this story that was later published that let her relatives know that she was still alive, even if the rest of her family wasn't. Faina didn't know anything of this though, and after the interview, she was at a loss and stressed to her limits, and all she could do was stand outside and cry.

While she was crying, a soldier on a motorcycle who had had an ear shot off came up to her and asked her what was wrong, and she explained her story to him. The soldier knew that the Nazis were going to arrive at the city soon, and took her on his motorcycle to a train station. There he smuggled her into one of the luggage carts that were heading north, and left Faina there, with only the idea that north is where the rest of her relatives would probably be evacuating to. She arrived in a city in the north, but did not find her relatives.

As she was looking, an educated man came up to her and asked her about what had happened and why she was alone. She told him her story and he turned out to be a Jewish doctor from Ukraine, and he took her home to his wife and their two young children. They housed her there for ten days, and somehow, out of the rags of the Jewish community, they were able to find her better and warmer clothes since it was already November. They were also able to scrounge up enough money to buy her a ticket for a train to where her uncle lived, for she remembered his address, and enough food to last her at least an amount of time. Then she was sent off.

Faina was on the train for a long time, but in the middle of the journey, there was a one hour break and she got off the train to stretch. While she was standing next to her wagon, she heard an ear-shattering shriek, and turned to see her brother running toward her. He quickly took her to their mother, who fainted upon seeing her daughter alive. Faina's mother was taken to a local medical facility, but she quickly recovered and they continued to travel on together. They finally made it to safety at Faina's uncle, who was relieved to see them alive, because he believed that only Faina survived.

Years later, after the war had passed, Faina and her family returned to Mariupol to find what was left of the city. It was mostly burnt down, including their house, in which they only found a small mortar and pestle among the ashes. The family was given a certificate for Faina's father's death, and when her brother finished school, he was taken into the army. Faina also went back to school, and ended up writing poems for her classes about her experiences. She finished with top marks and went on to the Second University in Russia to become a doctor. She now resides in California with her family and friends.

Assemblymember Fiona Ma
District 12



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Ben Altman

Interviewed by Rabindra Hayashi

Linda Breder

Interviewed by Siobhan Twomey

Lea Grinberger

Interviewed by Noah St. James

Luna Harrison

Interviewed by Mindy Xu

Cecilia Kornbluth

*Interviewed by Gladys Martinez &
Shelby Getsla*

Guta Piotrkowski

Interviewed by Sarah Rosenberg-Wohl

Morris Piotrkowski

Interviewed by Aaron Tartakovsky

Pola Reinharz

Interviewed by Donna Budman

Samuel Sonnenblick

Interviewed by Christian Reynoso

Tauba Weiss

Interviewed By Tamara Jansen

Mella Wendell-Katznelson

Interviewed by Sonia Bernick

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Rabbi Micah Hyman, Congregation Beth Sholom

Michael Sweet

Ben Altman

By Rabindra Hayashi

I think what struck me most was his paintings. We always hear that a picture is worth a thousand words, but what about emotions? Maybe it was the warm oranges, maybe it was the reflection in the water, maybe it was just the silhouette. I don't think I've ever been so astounded by paintings. His paintings were more real than photographs.

Born with the name Ben Altman in 1912, Ben was the son of a tailor and the eldest of seven siblings. In his early years, he lived in Czestochowa with his family. At the age of twelve, he began working for his father as a tailor. Ben was a tailor from then on and never had any other occupations. When Ben got older, he moved to Sosnowiec. His reasons for moving were simple: he wanted to break away from his father's shop and thought that business would be better in Sosnowiec. And he was right. He continued to live in Sosnowiec until the war, eventually getting married and having a son.

Before the war, there were already anti-Semitic sentiments. When Ben was sixteen, someone hit him on the head with a bat hard enough to hospitalize him. Despite this, however, there was very little relationship between the Jews and the non-Jews. Most of the interaction happened in shops for business. Ben knew of Hitler's rise to power and of what was happening in Germany before the Nazis invaded Poland. While he was worried about it, he worried about it in the same way a person would worry about an interior issue of another country.

When the Nazis came, there was nothing to do. For the first few days he hid, but eventually people had to go out for groceries, for work, for day to day life. Nazis changed life initially, but little by little life began normalize until Ben was eventually taken by the Nazis.

Ben was taken to a ghetto. His ghetto life was very short lived, however. A single night and the next morning, the Nazis ordered him to go work. That morning was the last time he saw his wife and son. The Nazis took him to a school building where the windows were "boarded up... you couldn't look out, you couldn't look in." There were at least a hundred people with him. The next morning the Nazis ordered him and the others to line up abreast. From there, it was a march to the train station, where empty cattle cars waited. The Nazis took everyone to a town where they stayed for three days. There, everyone's head was shaved. After the hair grew back in the camps, the middle of their heads were shaved in order to make them more easily identifiable. After three days, everyone was lined up like "horses at a market." The Nazis picked out the people they wanted, and Ben was sent to Klettendorf, a concentration camp.

The rations at camps were horrible, almost completely inedible and totally inadequate. Ben easily recalled the bad food of the camp, saying, "If you put that soup out in front of a pig, it wouldn't eat it." During his life in the camp, he never got used to

the soup. He and his friend worked out a deal: Ben would give his friend the soup and he would take his friend's tiny slice of bread. People invented contraptions to help divide rations.

Other people, he remembers, would go into the kitchen trash and cook potato peels. They would cook them on the closest thing the camp barracks had to a stove, although it didn't cook and it didn't warm the rooms up. People died of hunger often. Ben remembers, "You could talk to a man and a half an hour later, he was dead."

Ben took me downstairs to his studio, and behind a stack of paintings, he pulled out an oil painting. It depicted men sitting around a table with a device to measure bread, each one with a shaven strip down his head. In the middle of the table, there was a piece of bread, on which one man placed a strange, improvised device. Ben told me this was the way they divided bread fairly.

Survival was very difficult. People were assigned jobs despite the tiny rations, and the jobs were assigned with a total disregard to people's skills. Ben was a tailor, but at camp, he was ordered to become a bricklayer, constructing barracks for more people. Eventually, Ben began to volunteer illegally in the camp's tailor shop, but he kept it quiet. Ben says, "I tried to get away, to make myself invisible. To not be there. This is how I survived."

During his time in the camp, Ben received something truly shocking: a package from his wife. Somehow, against all odds, she had found out to which camp Ben had been housed, obtained a paper and pencil (nobody in the camps was supposed to have pencil or paper) and sent him a package.

At this point, the telephone rang. Ben got up to answer the phone, and spoke a few words in a language I didn't understand. When he got back, he told me that it was his friend of fifty years. He calls everyday to make sure Ben is okay. He told me, "That's what friends are for, you see."

Inside the package was a loaf of bread. Inside the loaf of bread was what was truly remarkable: a letter from his wife. The only communication in all his years in camps was a letter hidden inside of a loaf of bread. His wife and child died when they were in concentration camps.

Ben took me to another room and showed me a watercolor. He asked me if I knew what it was. I told him I didn't, and he told me. The watercolor showed a man sleeping, a fence, and a child in drowning in a river. There is a man trying to reach through the fence to save the child, but he has no way to reach. Ben told me that it was a dream he had: he dreamed that his son was drowning and that he was stuck behind a fence. He tried to reach for his son, but he could not reach him. Ben told me that this was how he knew his son died during the war.

May 8th, 1943. The war was over, but Ben was still in a camp. The people in the camps didn't know what to do. There were no Germans, but there were no Russians either. Some people said that they should walk away as free people, but there was no place to go. There were no Russians in sight until the second day after the Germans left. They were liberated and given a speech by a Russian captain, promising freedom. There was one thing the Russian captain said: "If you don't work, you don't eat."

The Russians made their headquarters in an old German villa. When the Russians came, the Germans had left. The town was completely abandoned, and people moved into the old German houses. As Ben says, "We made ourselves comfortable." Ben and one of his friends met two Russian officers, who were coincidentally Jewish. They didn't speak much Yiddish, but Ben and his friend were able to explain that they were Jews who had just been liberated. The Russian officers told Ben and his friend to come that night to the officer's room. When they approached the window, the officers signaled to let them in and were offered drinks. Then the officers began to ask them what they were doing and what they wanted to do. Ben and his friend explained that they were both tailors, and they wanted to open the shop. The officers said that was no problem. Because the Germans had left the villa, everything was abandoned, including the SS warehouse. It was easy to take whatever one wanted from the warehouse. When they went through the warehouse, there were sewing machines. And so, Ben and his friend opened a shop in that villa. They were limited to doing only work for officers - special permission was required for private work. Ben worked for the Russians for four months, living in the villa with his friend and his second wife, whom he met in the camp. After that, he returned to Poland to find whoever he could.

When he returned to Poland, he found two of his brothers who had been liberated a half year earlier. Ben took them to the Russian camp and continued to work for the Russians and was given documentation indicating he worked for them. He continued to work for the Russians, but didn't want to stay in Poland. He waited until New Year's Eve of 1946 to make his move. Ben, with his second wife, planned to cross the border illegally onto the American side that night. On New Year's, "the guards had been celebrating so they didn't think that anybody was going on New Year's in the middle of the night to cross the border. We did. And we crossed the border in to Eastern Germany. Right into the arms of the German Police."

Ben was captured by the German Police and subjected to interrogations. He had cousins in Munich, so he told them that he was heading for Munich. The German police didn't object, and after Ben gave them a bottle of Polish whiskey, they let Ben and his wife go. Ben says, "They knew we would be caught in the Russian Zone." And they were right: Ben and his wife were caught at the border between the Russian and the American zone.

Ben was caught by the secret Russian police. "They wanted to interrogate somebody, so they let that person fall asleep, then woke him up, took him out and started interrogating him." They kept him in a cell for a week first. Finally, on that Saturday night they began to interrogate him. Ben was taken into an office. There was an officer

at the desk, where all of Ben's possessions lay out in front of him on the desk. The first question the officer threw at Ben was a political question: "Why do you want to go with the Americans?" Rather than answering the question, Ben countered with another question. He asked, "What Americans? I don't know any Americans. I'm going to the Germans!" He told the officer that he had a sister in Munich from whom he had become separated and that he wanted to see her.

Ben asked the officer, "Can you blame me?" The officer couldn't anywhere with Ben. The officer asked him, "Don't you know you're not supposed to go to the Americans without a permit?" When Ben had been working for the Russians as a tailor, he had been given a slip of paper with an official Russian stamp. To this day, Ben doesn't know what the paper said. Ben took the risk and told him that it was his permit. It had a Russian stamp, and Ben was freed. He was told to return to Poland. Ben, however, refused to leave, and demanded that his wife be freed as well. He stood firm, and his wife was freed too.

At one o'clock in the morning they crossed the border during the first week of January. Ben told me, "We walked in a snow-covered city and we didn't know where to go. We had nowhere to go." They trudged through the snow and came across a train station. They thought they were on the right track and continued on, encountering a bakery. Ben went to the door and knocked on the bakery door at 3am, knowing he was going to wake up someone up. A man opened up the window above him and yelled down to him, asking him what he wanted. Ben told him that they needed food, and the baker asked not if he had money, but if he had stamps. Food stamps at this time were worth more than German Marks, but Ben had Marks. Ben told the baker that he had stamps anyway. The baker came down and offered rolls. Ben and his wife took the rolls, but when he tried to pay for them, the baker didn't even want the money. They wandered the town a little longer until they came across a restaurant and knocked on the door. He told them there that they had just been freed and they would like some coffee. The man in the restaurant gave them some tea, and after that, Ben and his wife returned to the train station.

At the train station, there was a large crowd already getting ready to board, and the trains were the same as before: cattle cars. Only now, Germans were getting on too because they were refugees as well. The train ran to another town, where Ben and his wife disembarked. Ben couldn't speak much German, but his wife could. His wife befriended a German woman and she told them that in order to get to Berlin, one needed to buy a ticket. The woman promised to buy a ticket for Ben and his wife.

The next day, they found out where the American displaced persons camps were. Ben doesn't remember how he and his wife arrived at the DP camps. For seven weeks, they lived there and Ben opened a tailor shop. Most refugees didn't want to work, so when Ben asked for permission, the men at the DP camp were surprised. Ultimately, however, he opened his shop. As Ben said, "It didn't last very long," because Ben left shortly after for West Germany. He asked permission to go to the Western Zone and it was granted.

In the Western Zone of Germany, Ben and his wife landed in another DP camp. They left quickly for Munich, where Ben searched for his cousin. Finally, he found someone who knew his cousin, and made contact. His cousin took Ben and his wife in. His cousins, who had come illegally from Poland and had been hiding, knew many people from Munich. Ben, however, could not stay with his cousins forever, and went to the Jewish Committee. The head of the committee was a man Ben had worked for in Sosnowiec. He recognized Ben, and assisted Ben in finding housing for Ben and his wife. Ben opened up another store in Munich, stating, "I did pretty good in Munich." Ben stayed in Munich until he received his chance to come to America in 1949.

Ben paused and asked me, "Have you been to New York?" When I told him that I hadn't, he told me "Then you haven't seen the close-up of the Statue of Liberty... It's a good sight. You come from Europe and you see the Statue of Liberty and you know you are in America."

In August 1949, Ben and his family, which, by this time included a son, arrived in New York. Ben didn't speak any English, stating "I was a mute!" His cousins helped him get housing and set up shop in America as a tailor. He didn't stay in New York for very long. Ben and his wife ended up in San Francisco.

In San Francisco, there were a lot of Jews, but most of them had come from Shanghai. Ben still didn't speak English, but he managed to set up a shop anyway. He lived in downtown San Francisco near his tailor shop, which he ran for seventeen years. Eventually, he went to work for another men's store in Union Square. Ben worked there for thirteen years, until he retired. After he retired, he began his painting. Ben has been living and painting in San Francisco ever since.

Ben has many more paintings, not all about his experiences in the Holocaust. For example, he has a whole set of watercolors from "Fiddler on the Roof" and has some oil paintings of scenes from the Torah. Ben explained to me that he likes to create oil paintings because they last forever. They stay where they are. Ben continues to paint.

Linda Breder

By Siobhan Twomey

On February 24, 1924, Linda Breder was born in Stropkov to a family consisting of a merchant father, house mother, three brothers, and one sister. The family had been living on Main Street of the Czechoslovakian town since the 17th century. The Orthodox Jewish family attended synagogue regularly and never experienced any conflict with their Christian neighbors. Linda attended school with students of both faiths, which was not surprising considering difference in beliefs was never an issue for the children.

However, this peace between neighbors was disturbed in 1939 when the Stropkov Town Council fell into control of the anti-Semitic Hlinka Party. At age 14, Linda was thrown out of school, her father's leather business was liquidated, and their family was sent to the outskirts of town. New laws emerged against the Jewish people specifying that they could not own property or live on Main Street; ultimately relocating these families and putting 4 or families in one shack. Also forced to bear a yellow Star of David, this was the first time religious differences were apparent to Linda and her friends.

On March 26, 1942, the first deportation to Auschwitz sent Linda and the other girls from their town to the concentration camp about 5 hours away. Told they would be working to make money to support their now struggling families, many of these young women, including Linda, did not pack any personal belongings for the trip.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, Linda saw beautiful "dormitories" and "factories" where she thought she would be working. She would soon learn that these were barracks with up to 1,000 girls in each and the "factories" were, in fact, crematories. Entering the iron gate of the camp, Linda along with about 60 girls were put into a room "like laundry or luggage would be packed." However, Auschwitz did not only host Jewish people, but it placed them in the same category and confinement as German criminals.

Daily life consisted of being woken up by Germans "with a bang," already dressed in the clothes given to them, which were merely old Russian military uniforms. With no stockings or undergarments, Linda wore lice-infested attire to work on the frozen fields where she had to spread manure. The weather was freezing and those who fell ill were "sentenced to death." While suicide took the lives of several prisoners, Linda never felt this temptation. She recalls a girl living with diabetes surrendering to her disease by jumping from the window of the 2nd floor of her barrack. With news arriving only every 2 or 3 months, as far as Linda knew she could be set free the next day, so she continued living and working with hope as her only motivation. She lived by the thought "Somebody has to be alive in the end, so why not me?" Of 90,000 Jews at Auschwitz, 10% survived, and only 5 from Linda's hometown of Stropkov lived beyond the concentration camp.

Linda practiced and perfected the routine of waking up early, fighting off others to get any water and food, and working in the camp's fields. On Sundays, the prisoners were given the slightest gift of not having to work. On these days, if it was hot, Linda would go to the roof of the barracks and try to kill the lice from her uniform. Not only were her clothes filthy, but she also slept with her shoes on because people would steal the shoes of others. She also had to hold on to her red bowl that would get her any soup and tea. If it were stolen, there would be no food or drinks.

After three years of this lifestyle, Linda Breder was liberated by the Russians on May 5, 1945. However, this was not the end of her struggles. Poland was still occupied by Nazis so the freed Jews walked for a month in the snow to Berlin. Unfortunately, for Linda, none of her family, except her sister, survived. It took a while to recover from the damage caused by years of not working or going to school, and the psychological recovery is likely eternal, but Linda got through one of the darkest times the world has experienced. Today she lives in San Francisco with her husband Fred Breder, also a Holocaust survivor.

Lea Grinberger

By Noah St. James

The rise of Nazi Germany was filled with villains, but it was also a time of heroes. Out of the war emerged heroes from every country: soldiers, doctors, and even regular citizens who helped hide those being hunted--but one class of hero, which must never be forgotten, is the survivors. Lea Grinberger, an 82-year-old widow, is a survivor.

Born in 1926, Lea grew up somewhere in West Czechoslovakia. During her childhood there were many occupations – she recalls her small town being occupied by Hungary – so even now she does not know quit where she grew up. Lea went to school until 1941, when the Hungarians occupied her small town, and Jews were told they were no longer allowed to attend school. In only a few weeks, the neighboring towns' Jewish population was gathered up and taken away and among that group was one of Lea's best friends. The Hungarian army later drowned her friend.

On April 14, 1941, all of the Jews in Lea's town were told to be ready by morning to be taken somewhere else. The next morning all of the Jewish population of the town was taken to the Jewish synagogue and brought onto cattle train. Lea, and the others, were taken 30 kilometers away from their village and brought to the ghetto where there was nothing but tents. The tents were made of only a few poles for support and a roof. There were no walls or sides to them and the cold weather was bitter.

Sleeping under these tents, with only the clothes on their backs to protect them from the cold, Lea and her family stayed in the ghetto for six weeks. Lea turned 18 here, while she and the rest of the family waited for news of what was going on in Europe. When they finally left the ghetto, it was only to be herded back into the cattle car, only this time with more people, hundreds of people. After two or three days on the packed and cramped train, they arrived at Auschwitz.

The last time Lea ever saw her grandfather, father, and brother occurred when they stepped off of the train, for soon after all of them were divided up by gender. She went with her mother to the camp, and as they got there they could see the fires and the incinerators.

That night Lea and her mother were taken to block 32. The blocks were not city blocks as there are now, but instead they were long, cold, cement buildings. Dozens of these overcrowded buildings stretched the camp and made up the barracks for the prisoners. With no food and no room to lie down, no knowledge of where she was or what was going on, Lea could not sleep. At around 2:00am hundreds of prisoners were taken out of the blocks and lined up outside, standing at attention until they were told otherwise. Hours of waiting in line, no one allowed to sit or leave until the guard came by with the little piece of food they were given for the day: a slice of bread, some water, and if they were lucky a small piece of cheese. Constantly visible was the crematorium. The smell produced from it was almost toxic to the prisoners. After a time, Lea asked the guard of their block “ ‘What is that?’ And she was told it was her parents, ‘The smoke is your parents.’ ”

This was how she lived, constantly afraid of what came next, always aware that she could be the next of many victims of the crematorium. Always aware of her possible fate, “You see the

fence, and you see body hanging on the fence, then tomorrow a second one.” Lea was taken to Nuremberg. The camp was out from the city and was across the street from the cemetery. The area surrounding the camp was constantly bombarded with bombs from the airplanes passing overhead.

“They [the Jewish prisoners] don't go to the bunker. It was inside the block and then the planes were [passing] and – and – Bombing. We cannot do nothing. No, we – we hoped and everything, maybe they know we are here and they no bombing us. One morning in May '50– we are in the bed, and somebody look out small windows by the roof and– one woman she looked. We are free. Oh, we are free. Look, look, everybody look. You know, there was a forest, and you see from forest like – how to tell you – like the people. Much, much, much people, and they come in here to us and they go to the Germans. The Germans were – they was in another – different street of us. You are free [they said]. You go. You go. They opened the gates – some people they go to the Germans' building and from the kitchen was bread –everything was there. Peoples with me, we go to the city to see what we can do. The[re] would be help for everybody.”

Finally, after years away from home and subject to cruel and inhuman conditions in concentration camps, Lea was home, “In June when I came to go home in Budapest, I heard my mother's alive. My brother and my father passed away a week before celebration.” But rather than leave her home town and travel to America, as the American soldiers tried to convince her to do, Lea decided to stay and help to rebuild the life of the city. Lea stayed for years, but once again Lea was faced with hard times as her husband of many years died and Lea, having no more family in her home town moved to Israel to be with her daughter.

Lea is one of many internment camp survivors of the Holocaust. Not all of life is fair, and you try to take what you are given in stride, but the holocaust is not something that can be taken lightly. Lea and the other survivors lived through one of the world's darkest hours, and in this jet-black, starless night found the courage to keep moving towards the sunshine. Years later they still have to live with the memories of this tragedy; Lea, one of the unsung heroes of the Holocaust.

Luna Harrison

By Mindy Xu

I was given the opportunity to learn more about the Holocaust this spring. At first I thought maybe... but this was a once in a life time opportunity and I had just learned of the Rape of Nanking at school. This encouraged me to salve my curiosity about similarities and differences in various tragedies throughout history. What started out as a small interest, turned into my full involvement when I meet, and interviewed, a survivor named Luna Harrison. No materials I have read so far in history class could have prepared me for this meeting. I was so nervous. I didn't know where to begin. How can I ask someone to revisit their horrid memories of the Holocaust? But no matter what I was determined to get her story and not lose it to the wind where no one will hear it, thus never learning the tragic misdeeds of the Holocaust.

Luna was born an only child April 22, 1934 to Refka and Morris. In May 1940, the German army invaded the Netherlands, resulting in a progressively more helpless living conditions for the family and the rest of the Jews in Holland. Luna, as were all Jews, was deprived of her freedoms, little by little. Forced to wear the distinctive star at all times, the children and schoolmates she knew started to shun her and even treated her with contempt. She remembers, at times, taking the star off her clothing and making faces at Nazis.

It was late at night when a loud pounding awoke Luna from her slumber. She knew at once it was the Gestapo, the secret police that work under the Nazi regime. Luna's family packed what they could and got into a truck which drove them to the building, Theatre Joodse Schouwburg. At that point it was clear to Luna that they were all prisoners. Luna was separated from her parents and had to sleep in a child's size bed that was too small for her. Her family and others just like them were contained for a few weeks before being deported.

It was August 1943, when Luna, age 9, boarded the cattle train to the transit camp, Westerbork with her family and countless others. At arrival, her shoes were taken away and replaced with wooden shoes. She was then put into a barrack that was very unsanitary. The camp was very crowded and often times food supplies was short so many starved. Luna remembered during the stay at Westerbork that she had complained she was hungry and she would sort through piles of potato peels to look for a whole one. A Dutch friend said she knew a place where they could plant radishes, but the effort was futile since they had no seeds or roots to plant any.

In the camp there was a room where a small stage stood; Jewish prisoners would put on cabaret shows so life would seem more tolerable. There was also a little building where a few things were taught to emulate a sense of normalcy but that was impossible when the next day children came to class and realized a few more students had

disappeared. Luna was friends with a little girl named Stella, one day she was being picked on and Luna said to Stella's bullies, "What are you picking on her for?" Luna's time at Westerbork was a blur and much of it she doesn't remember but she does remember the last day at Westerbork. "The last day at Westerbork, people were grouped up. The man that was separating us shouted 'You, you and you are going to Auschwitz' "reminisced Luna. Luna and her family were going to Bergen-Belsen but Albert, a boy whose parents were friends with Luna's parents and her crush, was sent to Auschwitz. At that moment Luna knew Albert was going to die. There had been rumors circulating Westerbork that the camp was a death camp. Although the rumors went around, Luna claims she never heard them but knew when Albert was picked for Auschwitz she'd never see him again. The day before they were taken away, Albert teased Luna about the way she walked, pigeon toed. Luna said, "He still had the sense to joke when we both knew he was going to die." Luna had researched Albert to see if he was still alive after her escape; upon the list of those dead at Auschwitz was his name.

Luna and her family were transported by cattle cars from Westerbork to Bergen-Belsen on September 15, 1944. Just a few months later Anne Frank arrived in Bergen-Belsen from Auschwitz. As we now well known, Anne died in the camp after just two weeks from the disease Epidemic Typhus, which killed tens of thousands of inmates before the camp was liberated by the British Army. At one part, Luna remembered being transferred from the "neutral camp" within Bergen-Belsen, and that she and her parents were then forced to walk naked, take a shower, and relocated from the "star camp" where conditions were somewhat more tolerable. Even so, Luna has memories of sleeping on a bunk bed above her mother, but that the mattress was thin, filthy, and covered a few planks of wood. The blanket smelled bad but she used it to cover her face from the stench of the burning of the dead at Bergen-Belsen crematoria. At time, Luna's mother had a chance to wash Luna's hair at a cold water faucet above a basin. At other times, Luna remembers inmates relieving themselves over a large ditch. Luna became very ill at one point, with liver disease, and running a high fever but believed her life was saved because her loving mother was there next to her, devoted through out it all. They also had some relief from their starvation. Bergen-Belsen had one meal a day, and, one rare occasions, a few Red Cross packages got through and enjoy some meat and other items.

Out of the ten thousand Bergen-Belsen inmates who had been assured by the Nazis that they would eventually be released and exchanged, only Luna's group of 146 made it out. In March of 1945, Luna and her parents heard the incredible news that they were to be released from Bergen-Belsen. This news included the exchange between German civilian prisoners and the mainly Turkish prisoners, or Jewish inmates with Turkish citizenship, who were to be released to Sweden. Luna and her parents were evacuated from Bergen-Belsen, first by train via Hanover and Denmark to Gothenberg, Sweden. From there, Luna and her family went by ship to Liverpool, Britain (were they were not allowed to disembark) and finally on to Istanbul where they arrived in April 1945. Some of the memories Luna has of that emotional period of her life include that while she was traveling on the train, someone handed her an orange, and not realizing how to eat it, she ate the peel and all. Luna also told me that she remembers the name of the ship that sailed her to Istanbul, "Drottningholm." And finally, from the memory of the

11 year old Luna, she think that at the time of their release, her parents weighed no more than 60 or 70 pounds, and Luna was told to throw away her little blue sweater that was covered in lice.

The family took a boat to England from Sweden but wasn't let ashore because the English didn't want Jews to come in to England after the war. The whole time Luna was on the boat, she was exuberant about leaving the camp. She later landed on Burgas, one of the Princess Islands and went to a children's camp while her parents went to an adult camp. There, the food was abundant and Luna's father had to slap food out of her hands from eating too much or else her stomach would burst. "From hell to paradise" exclaimed Luna. Her mother taught her to swim on the island even though they were still a little weak from malnutrition. It was one of Luna's happiest memories.

Right after Luna left, the conditions at Bergen-Belsen got much worse as there was no water, and no food. They were exchanged three weeks before the camp was liberated by the British. The exchange was funded by an American Jointed Distribution Committee. The American Jointed Distribution Committee disclosed 142 Jews released in an exchange for an equal number of interned German civilians were permission to get off the boat at Istanbul, Turkey. The committee paid for everything from hotel rooms to transportation costs. Even though Luna was born in Holland, she wasn't a Dutch citizen because her father had dual citizenship. Luna was a Turkish citizen, which is one of the reasons Luna and her family were able to make it out. Her father, Michon was born in England even though his parents were Turkish. Luna communicated with her parents in many languages: with her mother, she spoke French, Dutch, and Ladino a medieval Spanish.

Luna moved back to Amsterdam after the war and married John Harrison, an American who was in the military-- he played piano and jazz. They got married in Germany and had a baby boy, Dana, before moving to Pocatello, Idaho. Luna first took a boat from Bremerhaven, Germany to New York where she then flew to Salt Lake City and was driven to Pocatello. Luna later on had a son named Leslie. She then separated from her husband and moved to San Francisco where she learned English. She has taken classes at San Francisco State University and lived in the Bay Area ever since.

Luna has been approached by many people, including Yale University, to share her story and Dr. A. Jurgens, a historian. Dr. A. Jurgens tried to contact Bergen-Belsen children survivors and found Luna. Luna began to cry as she told me how she asked who else survived and the historian replied two, Luna and Issie Cohen, a boy Luna knew.

Towards the end of the my interview with Luna, it felt like my mind was bombed. Usually I'd try to put my feet in other people shoes and try to understand what they are feeling. What Luna has told me made me realize I would never know how it really felt unless I was there. She made the Holocaust real to me, not like something you read in a book where it's just another time and space. All the events Luna has experienced made me see what a beautiful person she is. Even though the memories are painful, she revisits them to give us another reason on why evil like the Holocaust should never be repeated.

Cecilia Kornbluth

By Shelby Getsla

Adolf Hitler represented a great new source of evil in the world known as the Nazis. Nazis terrorized Jews and many others for years before World War II began in 1939. Cecilia Kornbluth, a survivor of the Holocaust, was 17 when the Nazis marched into her hometown of Vienna, Austria. It was 1938 and she vividly recalls the day the Nazis marched in, “The people welcomed the Nazis. There were signs saying, ‘Welcome’.” Not everyone was welcoming of the Nazis, which could be seen clearly on the streets of the city. “They broke shop windows and that’s how you knew. The owners were Jewish.”

School was not easy either. During the first few months of the Nazis’ occupation in Vienna, Cecilia says, “We didn’t go to school for a few weeks. I’d stay home to help my mother and do chores.” Finally, after a few weeks, school opened again. Cecilia recalls her first day back, “We had to use the service entrance. It was a little embarrassing.” Cecilia knew that most of the other students, who were not Jewish, would shun her and her friends. One day, a non-Jewish girl came to the table in the class where Cecilia was. “We said, ‘What are you doing? You’ll get in trouble.’ She said, ‘I don’t care. Let them see.’”

When the Nazis invaded, most thought that they would just pass through. Cecilia thought, “We didn’t think it would be that bad. We didn’t think that it would be that bad.” Cecilia lived with her parents and three brothers. Her father was a former soldier of the Austrian Army. Her father’s former career and having three brothers made it very dangerous to live in the city. “It was more dangerous to be a man. They would collect the men and send them away. Some didn’t come back.”

One night, the Nazis came for Cecilia’s father. “We could hear them coming up and we knew that we had to be quick.” Cecilia’s father hid in the bedroom. He laid down on the feather mattress and Cecilia fluffed the feathers around him to make the bed look empty. “As soon as I finished [the soldiers] came in. There were a few of them.” Cecilia pretended that she had been sweeping the floor. The Nazis began to search the home. “One checked under the bed and my heart was racing. I got even more scared when he checked under the bed again.” Cecilia thought for sure that they would be caught and they would find her father. Luckily, the Nazis left. The family knew the Nazis would be back, so they hid her father with a non-Jewish friend. He was safe for now. “The Nazis told us that we had a week to move out. We took only the necessities and left the rest in the apartment. We went to my aunt’s house.”

The Nazis began to ‘collect’ men that were involved in Jewish power movements—including one Cecilia’s brothers. Cecilia’s brother knew he had only two choices-- to run from the Nazis knowing that they would take his father instead or stay in Vienna and hope that they would leave his father alone. He stayed. After the Nazis had come for her brother, he was sent to two different camps. “They made them all line up.

They'd point you to the left or right. To the left, you would be killed. To the right, you would be sent to work." He was sent to the right. "His job was to carry out victims." He was able to get out of the camp, by earning an apprenticeship in England. He was sworn to silence and did not tell anyone what he had seen, heard, or done for 11 months.

Unfortunately, her father was not safe for long. After her brother was released from Buchenwald, her father and mother were sent to France where her father died. Her brother was sent to Auschwitz Camp. "They said he died of a heart attack. My father never had heart problems. There's no way he could have died of a heart attack." Her two remaining brothers fled to other countries.

Cecilia knew that she, too, had to flee to stay alive. Cecilia arranged to cross the Austrian border to Switzerland to join one of her brothers. Cecilia was somewhat surprised when she found out that the man who helped her cross the border was of German descent. "The Swiss police told him, 'Don't do this. Helping those people is too dangerous.' He said, 'If I don't do it, who will?' And thank God he did." Cecilia also recalled the story of her aunt, and family, her mother's sister, in hiding. "They hid in the forest. There was a man who helped her survive. She was there for years, hiding. One day, he stopped. He said it was too dangerous now. She did survive." Cecilia's mother was one of ten children, only three survived.

Once Cecilia was in Switzerland, she stayed there for nine years. "[The Swiss] didn't want us there, but there was nowhere to go. It was nine years of nothing." Cecilia stayed in Switzerland for nine years from 1938-1947. One of Cecilia's brothers was able to go to the United States. Cecilia took her passport, which had been stamped with a 'J' by the Nazis in Austria and returned it to the German Embassy, and began to get ready to leave for America with stateless documents. By this time, Cecilia was married and had one son, George. It took two years to get to America.

Cecilia arrived in New York in 1947. She was twenty-seven years old. She recalls her time in New York. "I liked New York but my brother told me once he came to America we could move to California. He told me not to get stuck in New York." One thing that she was grateful for that happened in New York, "I ran into one of my old best friends from Austria. She was one of the top students in the school we went to."

Cecilia, her husband, and son moved to San Francisco in 1949 and became citizens. She has lived there ever since. When she hears about people who deny the Holocaust, she says, "What happened? What happened to my family, then? More than thirty people dead. If it didn't happen, how did they die? It's ignorance. The people who say that are ignorant. They are in denial about the whole thing." Cecilia loves the United States, especially San Francisco. She says, "I love it here because I have the freedom to have a life." She has increasing hope for future and what it may hold. She holds hope that her son will never go through what she and her family did. "I love my son so much. There are times when I look at him and I see my father. He is so much like my father." She hopes that nothing like the Holocaust will ever happen again. She says, "I appreciate they keep the memory alive. I was lucky. I feel there's hope for the world."

By Gladys Martinez

The Holocaust was the killing of over six million Jewish people during World War II. It was a program of extermination planned and accomplished by the National Socialist regime in Germany led by Adolf Hitler. What was it all for? Greed? Power? Hate? The loss of a life is not a trivial thing. Every life contributes to the world in a small way. The millions that were killed didn't have the chance to be major. But they were intelligent people with intelligent relatives. The Jewish people left angels on Earth - those angels are the survivors of the Holocaust who lived on to show the world the hardships they went through. In February, I interviewed a remarkable woman named Cecilia Kornbluth. She was one of the many Jews that strived for something better. Many people who knew that the war was worth fighting helped her. This is her story.

Cecilia grew up in a loving Jewish family. They were religious and they went to the synagogue. She lived in Vienna, Austria, along with her parents and three brothers. She had two older brothers and one younger brother. Cecilia and her brothers went to good schools and they received good marks. Cecilia studied English for a semester, and she disliked it completely! But Cecilia was carefree and she enjoyed life as it was. Then, when Cecilia turned seventeen, the Nazis came to Austria. When the Nazis entered the city of Vienna, they were greeted as heroes. Young men and women cheered for the Nazis. The children were very enthusiastic. Husbands and wives held their children as the soldiers passed by. They smiled politely and cheered along.

Then things began to happen. They began to search the houses in Vienna. One day, as the family was at home, there was a gruff knock at the door. Cecilia would never forget that knock. The whole family knew that the soldiers were searching for strong Jewish men. Cecilia grabbed the broom and opened the front door. The soldiers walked in. The soldiers kicked everything with their boots. Then pointed at things with their guns. The soldiers left and that day, the soldiers went home empty handed. Her father had hidden inside the feather mattress in the room. The soldiers checked many times under her bed. Her father had hidden himself in the stuffing of the mattress to remain free. Cecilia and her family knew that the soldiers hadn't been satisfied. So, they gathered up what they could carry. They took a few beds and a cabinet of things. They moved out of their house because it belonged to the city and they knew for sure that the Nazis would return. Scared and tired, Cecilia and her family arrived at her aunt's house. They weren't welcomed warmly that day. The neighbors looked them in the eye and said: "We don't want any more Jews here."

Usually, people would be crowding in the streets, but when the Nazis marched, people avoided being near them. All Jewish stores were closed. Temples were destroyed. Cecilia was thankful that she wasn't branded as other people were-she didn't have to wear the yellow Star of David on her clothes. When she applied for a passport in Vienna, the government gave her the middle name of Sarah. During the war, the name Sarah was given to all Jewish women to identify them, and they stamped on a big J on her passport to signify that she was of the Jewish faith. These acts really made Cecilia think. Were the

Nazis trying to make Jewish people feel ashamed of their own culture by treating them so badly? There were signs on the benches in the parks that read in bold letters: No Jews Allowed. Jewish people couldn't even use the main entrances of places.

To protect the family, Cecilia's parents encouraged her and her brothers to move. Her older brother listened to their parents and fled to Switzerland and France. The younger brother only left so that his father's life wouldn't be in jeopardy. But her younger brother was caught and put into a concentration camp. He was relocated to Auschwitz. Afraid of what happened to his son, Cecilia's father fled to France, where he was caught by Nazi forces and put into a concentration camp. Her brother was twenty-one when he was in Auschwitz. He saw the people being brought in. He saw when the people were lined up and sent in two different ways. His job was to carry the victims. Who knows what other evils his eyes saw? No one deserves to see another innocent life being taken away.

Then, Cecilia discovered that her father was dead. The Nazis had written on the death papers that her father had died of a heart attack in a concentration camp. In her heart, Cecilia knew that it was untrue. But what could she do? She didn't have a tomb to visit. So what she did was go to America. She never held anything against any German people because a brave policeman helped her cross the border and carried her across into Switzerland. The man who guided her was German and he helped her even though his own life was at risk. The police knew he was doing it and they advised him to stop. He helped how he could. She arrived in New York knowing that she had to work. Unfortunately, Cecilia got sick. She came down with the measles and wasn't able to go to her first day of work in a lampshade factory. She came in 1947 to build a life with freedom.

She was married and had a beautiful and hardworking child named George. George was born in Switzerland. Cecilia was able to get him United States citizenship and he attended UC Berkeley. From New York, Cecilia and her little family moved to the city of San Francisco in 1949.

I was very fortunate to hear Cecilia's story. Her life was full of so many twists and turns, but she never stopped at the end of a tunnel - she always kept on going until she found something better.

Guta Piotrkowski

By Sarah Rosenberg-Wohl

In the mid-20th century, Firma Hauser was a thriving German cloth manufacturing company. It was also the company for which the teenaged Guta Rosenberg worked, sewing fabric into large sheets in the Parschnitz concentration camp.

Parschnitz, located in Czechoslovakia, was one of dozens of camps that made up the Gross-Rosen concentration camp complex. When Guta was twelve years old, she was taken to the camp by train. Her parents, Moshe and Bluma Rosenberg, were left behind in Olkusz, Poland. They both died during the war, although Guta does not know how.

Guta was born in Olkusz, a small Polish town of about three to four-thousand people, on March 5, 1927. Her birth name was Gusta Rosenberg, though she now prefers to be called Guta or Gittl. On September 5, 1939, the Germans occupied Olkusz, and, within a few months, Guta was sent to Parschnitz. By 1942, when the liquidation of the Olkusz ghetto was complete, most of the 4097 Olkusz-area Jews listed by the Germans had been deported to Auschwitz. Only about 250 Jews from the city and the surrounding areas survived the war.

After Parschnitz was liberated by the Russians in 1945, Guta, though relieved, was unsure of what to do. She was sent to a displaced persons camp in Engelsberg, in the Baiern region of Germany. In the camp, she met her husband, Morris Piotrkowski, and they soon fell in love and married. They spent 1945 and 1946 in the camp, and then, in December 1946, moved to a village near Munchen, where they lived until 1949. Her first son, Jakob, was born there on March 21, 1947. Guta hated Germany, however, and said, "I wanted to run away from there." In 1949, she succeeded.

Guta and Morris Piotrkowski moved to Herzliya, Israel. The city, then only a very small town near Tel Aviv, was their home for the next eight years. Guta loved Israel, and commented that in Israel "you have everybody as a friend." She loved the inclusiveness and friendliness of the Israelis—she would often look out of her window on to the street, and recognize a friend or acquaintance walking. In Israel, Guta felt she was never lonely.

Some of Morris's family, however, lived in the United States, including his uncle, a chicken farmer, in Petaluma, California. The Piotrkowskis decided to move to the United States. They spent two years in Canada while waiting for their visas to come to America. In 1957, they moved to Montreal, and on November 7th of that year, her second son, Benny, was born.

They received their visas in 1959, and the Piotrkowskis moved to Petaluma. They soon moved to San Francisco, where Morris worked downtown as a tailor—the same

profession he had held his entire life—and Guta, when not taking care of her sons, worked for a janitorial service in a downtown bank. They have lived in the city ever since.

Morris Piotrkowski

By Aaron Tartakovsky

Morris Piotrkowski and the Jews of Lask

My heart wrenched as he spoke. I sat there listening, struggling to fight back a flood of tears.

It was a hot August afternoon in Poland in 1942. Morris and his family, along with 2,600 other Jews from the small town of Lask, were packed into the town's church like livestock. They were ordered into the church single-file through the side entrance, all the while being barked at and mercilessly clubbed by Nazi soldiers. As they were led into the old, musky church, a 22-year-old Morris sat in line quietly, not wanting to draw attention to himself. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, Morris glimpsed a guard charging towards his mother, club in hand. In a moment of selfless bravery, Morris threw himself over his crouched mother. He laid there, a crumpled mass, shielding her, as he was beaten over the head. These beatings would become routine for Morris over the next three years.

Morris Piotrkowski was born in Lask, Poland in 1920. He, like all of the men in his family who had come before him, was a skilled tailor. When the Nazi occupation of Poland began, Lask had been converted into a ghetto. The liquidation of Lask officially began on Monday, August 24, 1942, at 1 p.m.

For two days, Morris was kept locked inside the church along with his family and the rest of the Jews from his town. Fear and panic were etched into the faces of all the condemned. A mother screamed as she gave birth to a child inside the sweltering building. The chief rabbi was awakened from his quiet stupor by a frantic young couple pleading for him to marry them. The rabbi refused, saying that such a thing was impossible there, in a Christian church, in such dirt. Those were the only words uttered by the rabbi on those dark days.

After three harrowing days of confinement, the selection process began. All Jews fit for labor were hastily ordered to exit the church - among them were Morris, his father, and his sister Pessa. The Jews were split into two lines by gender. The Nazis were searching for able-bodied laborers. Separated from his sister, Morris remained with his father at the end of the male line. Morris and his father quickly grew worried that the quota for tailors would be minimal and thus quickly filled before they reached the front of the line. Their suspicions were soon confirmed.

As they reached the evaluation spot, they were told that only a single tailor was needed. Because Morris was a fit young man he was selected, while his father, at 49-years-old, was deemed useless by the Nazis and thrown back into the church. Nearly all of the members of Morris's family perished in the flames at the Chelmno Extermination

Camp: his grandfather Nussan Piotrkowski, his father Yukel "Jakob" Piotrkowski, his mother Idess Shwartz Piotrkowska, his younger brother Baruch Piotrkowski, and his sisters, Hendel, Yochevet, and Lifcia Piotrkowska. Morris and his sister Pessa were the only two from his family to walk away from the church that day. That was the last time Morris ever saw his family. He would become an orphan only hours later.

Morris remained in a nearby field for two days surrounded by armed soldiers. He sat in the grass, helplessly watching as his family was marched off to their deaths at Chelmno. Two days after he had been taken from the church, Morris and his sister Pessa were loaded onto a crowded train and sent off to the Lodz ghetto.

In Lodz, Morris resumed tailoring. He described life in the ghetto as a constant flow of people coming in and people going out. Morris knew that those going out were most likely heading to their deaths, so he was careful not to draw attention to himself. "I was not the best, but I was also not the worst. I was in the middle." This strategy of anonymity is what allowed Morris to survive.

For nearly two years, Morris's life in the ghetto continued somewhat uneventfully. After arriving one day to his tailoring job intoxicated, Morris was severely beaten by the shopkeeper and thrown into the streets. Fortunately for Morris, he was quickly offered a job by another factory owner, where he performed various odd jobs. And so, Morris continued his life in the Lodz ghetto, until the fateful day that he was separated from his last remaining family member.

One afternoon, Morris was randomly detained by the police and sent to the central police station. The police were rounding up all of the able-bodied men to send off to another labor camp. Morris's sister Pessa was informed by a friend that Morris was being held at the police station. That night, Pessa snuck out their home and secretly made her way to the police station. One of the laws in the ghetto at that time was that no Jews were permitted outdoors between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. under penalty of severe punishment or death. Nonetheless, Pessa, determined to see her brother, crept up to the window of the holding cell and made contact with Morris. Frantic and alone, she asked him what she should do - stay in the ghetto or flee. Unsure himself, Morris did not give her a straight answer, but rather indicated to her that she had a home and a bed in the Lodz ghetto, so maybe she shouldn't risk fleeing. Trusting in her brother, a frightened Pessa left the station and went to live with two aunts who were also trapped in the ghetto. Three months later, that section of the Lodz ghetto was liquidated. To this day, Morris does not know his sister's fate and wonders what would have happened had he told her to flee.

Alone and without family, a resilient Morris was sent to the Czestochowa ghetto in 1944. It was there that he worked at an ammunition factory in the Hassag Labor Camp, producing arms for the German soldiers. Morris, however, was physically unable to withstand the harsh conditions inside the factory and was repeatedly beaten until finally being moved outdoors. It was out in a surrounding field that Morris worked, performing manual labor. He persevered in the ammunition factory until the tide of war began to turn against the Germans. Afraid that their atrocities would be discovered, the Germans began

to move the Jewish prisoners away from the front lines. Morris was taken to Buchenwald on January 15, 1945, where he worked for several weeks until the final move.

Certain that the war was lost, the Nazi Germans made one last-ditch effort to exterminate more Jews. For two weeks Morris was forced on a “death march” towards the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp in Czechoslovakia. The German forces, however, were intercepted by the Russians and, on May 8, 1945, after three painful years, Morris was liberated.

Initially, after returning home to Lask, where he found no family and was not allowed to enter his home, Morris went to a displaced person’s camp in Germany. There he met his wife Guta, who had been working in a women’s labor camp. Morris and Guta continued to live in Germany—during which time they had their first son, Jack—until 1949, when they made Aliya to Israel and began to receive German reparations, or “widergutmachung,” literally, “making good gain.” For ten years, they lived and worked on a kibbutz in Herzliya. One day, Morris received a call from his uncles who had survived the war and were living in Petaluma, California. In 1959, Morris and his family, leaving their life in Israel behind, set out to join them. They first moved to Montreal, Canada, where they lived for a year awaiting visas, and where their second son, Benny, was born. In 1960, they made it to America, where they have lived ever since

Today Morris and his wife, Guta, live in San Francisco and are still happily married. Two of Morris’s cousins, who survived the Lodz ghetto, also live in the city.

Pola Reinharz

By Donna Budman

German Day

I sat in a trance-like state, watching clover-shaped clouds flit across the bright sky, whose sunny rays had penetrated my living room window. And, like so many times before, my thoughts drifted with the marshmallowy masses just behind the glass.

My hair, face, and hands were covered in an unshakable layer of filth as I worked. My forearms ached with the stress but I continued to work, no other possibility entered my mind. I had woken up that morning feeling incredibly helpless and alone, a once unfamiliar feeling that had now overrode all my other thoughts.

Moving to the next machine, I tripped on my rags but continued to move, unfeeling and unseeing, little more than a half-dead, or rather half-alive, skeleton. When this is over, I told myself, when this is over, they will pay. They will pay, was the token phrase in Grunberg labor camp. Here, this had become the chant of the helpless and the dispossessed. Said ten times when living was the state we resigned to because death took more design.

And then, like an overwhelming wave pulled by the tide, memories of the past three years flooded me. I recalled the first day I had spent hiding alone, merely a girl of fourteen, in my building's cellar. I recalled the day I had been torn from my mother, Bincia, and loaded onto the train headed for Sosnowiec, thrust into a crowded compartment with less humanity than awarded to cattle. I recalled each of these days and suddenly I was overcome, filled by an uncontrollable urge, rather a need, to see the day. I had not seen the beautiful day outside for countless months, leaving for work before the morning light and returning after the sun had set. This was no longer something I could accept and I knew as the day's rays hit the glass windows that no matter the punishment that may follow, I absolutely had to see the bright day that had meant playtime not so long ago.

As quickly as I could manage, I shuffled to the window and plastered my thin face to the glass. I gasped, for the German landscape looked nothing like I had imagined. Pristine and pure, there was no trace of the blood spilled, the hearts torn, and the lives mangled in the years since 1939 on the leafy trees and the shaggy bushes. I stood there, utterly hypnotized as if someone had nailed my feet to the ground and forbidden me to turn away.

Suddenly, I felt a warm, heavy hand on my shoulder that turned me round. In front of me stood my foreman, large, round, and kind, and though I opened my mouth to offer explanations and excuses, I knew they were unnecessary. His eyes, oceans of turmoil, silenced me. It's okay, Pola, it's all right, he whispered. And then, without a

second thought or reservation, I clung to him, allowing the pools, which had been threatening to overflow my eyes for days, spill abundantly. This man, this unique man, was the first who had truly shown me kindness in the midst of the cruelty that was so prominent in Grunberg.

With a quick shake of the head, I snapped back to the present and an inexplicable, humorless laugh made its way from my mouth. Considering how much I had already endured, I often didn't want to relive such memories, to remember such terrors. But only, I shook my head, if only it had ended with that one German day. But no, the worst was still to come. I was yet to be a part of the Death March, the slow step toward the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen in 1944, where the parade of terror continued; where I had only escaped by a rare stroke of fortune. I was yet to be unimaginably sick with typhoid, nursed and saved from death solely by my cousin Mary, who, in a sickly ironic twist of fate, would herself suffer under the diseases' unyielding reach. And I was yet to be finally saved by the British on April 15, 1945, to feel the kind of incomparable relief that one feels when emerging from a house of horrors, only to later find that the world could never completely right itself. I had emerged a living skeleton and spent months in a Swedish sanatorium, recovering and reconnecting with my only immediate surviving family, my sisters, Hava and Ester.

But, I thought as I sat, still watching the clouds, those memories too would come, and in time, I too would deal with them.

Samuel Sonnenblick

By Cristian Reynoso

According to Samuel Sonnenblick, life was tough for the younger people in Jaroslaw, Poland. The Catholic and the Jewish kids were always fighting because of their differences. However there wasn't much hostility among the adults. There was a higher concentration of Jews in the center of Jaroslaw, where Samuel lived. Born in 1924, Samuel lived in a house near City Hall in Jaroslaw with his parents, three sisters and one brother. His sister's names were Sara, Clara and Yocheved. His only brother was Moses. Samuel's favorite holiday as a child was Sukkot. He would decorate the roof and ceiling with branches and colorful decorations.

In 1933, when Samuel was 9 years old, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. Samuel knew Hitler was dangerous, but Hitler lived in Germany so there was nothing Samuel could do. He felt powerless. In September 1939, Germany began to take over Poland. One of the places attacked was Jaroslaw, which was bombarded. Everyone stayed underground in basements during the bombing. No damage was done to Samuel's house but a house near his was badly destroyed. Schools were closed once the war had started, but luckily Samuel had gone to commercial school two years before. Samuel and his family were expelled and forced to cross the river because the Germans did not want any Jews in border towns. He stayed in Rava Ruska and did nothing with his days but sell envelopes to earn money.

One day in June 1940, the secret police came knocking on his door and told him and his family to pack their bags. They were told their whole package could only weigh 100 kilos. They were taken to a packed boxcar with barely any food or water. The people in the boxcar had built a makeshift toilet, where all private business was done in public. They traveled for two and a half months and were brought to a Siberian labor camp. The labor camp was called Unit 41. In the labor camp, there was an average of 40 families. He was released 18 months later from the labor camp. The U.S.S.R and Poland had an agreement that they would let the Jews go free if they served in the Army, but Samuel was too young.

May 1945 signaled the end of World War II. Samuel went to Biysk until 1946 because he didn't want to be in a labor camp. He bought food on the black market for his family in order for them to survive in Biysk. He also studied English and took piano lessons. In the summer 1946, Samuel and his family were transported back to Poland. He then went to Stetin, the largest seaport in Poland on the Baltic Sea. There, he acquired documents to go to West Germany. He went to Bergen Belsen in a displaced persons camp where he gave lessons in English and mathematics in day school. When Israel was established in 1948, people started leaving the camp. They either went to Israel or the U.S. He got married in 1950 and left to the U.S on a transport ship for free. In February 1951, Samuel arrived in New York. When he arrived, he found a bedroom to live in and a job in mechanical drafting. He also took accordion lessons.

After 10 months of being in New York, Samuel and his wife moved to San Francisco, where he worked in drafting at a company that produced metal windows and doors. Samuel had to take three buses to get to work - twice, one of the buses did not arrive on time, causing him to lose his job. After that incident, he found an interesting job with Bechtel Corporation, designing a nickel smelter in Utah. After nine months, the design was complete and everyone was dismissed. Samuel was finally able to get a good position with Del Monte Corporation. His job consisted of layouts of industrial piping, boiler plants, food machinery etc. He also took college courses in industrial piping, air conditioning and heating. He progressed to senior draftsmen and then to designer in mechanical engineering, where he worked for 28 years.

Tauba Weiss

By Tamara Jansen

Tauba Weiss was born in Poland in 1926. At the age of 12, she ran from the Nazis, hiding in forests, snow and anywhere she could find. She lost her mother, 3 brothers and 2 sisters. One of her brothers survived; he was liberated on May 7, 1945 after being interned from September 1939 to May 1945. She saw many people get shot, buried alive, and killed including her own family members. She was taken to Lask where she lived in a large ghetto for 2 years and then spent 2 years in Lodge ghetto, followed by 6 years in Berkenow where she worked in an ammunition factory. Several times she was able to escape, but always captured then returned back to camp. Often times, women would come and ask for domestic helpers and Tauba was often chosen. By being able to speak 7 different languages including Polish and German, she was able to say that she was Polish, which helped in saving her life because she did not have papers to prove who she was. At the age of 18 she was liberated by the Russians. She is one of the few survivors of the Holocaust still with us today and an advocate for fighting Nazism. Her husband Morris Weiss is the founder of the Holocaust Center of Northern California. In memory of her husband, family members established a scholarship open to 11th and 12th grade Bay Area students each spring. When asked if she wanted to give any words of wisdom to the modern generations she stated, "They should not hate each other."

Mella Wendell-Katznelson

By Sonia Bernick

"It was a gradual process that these six million people turned into ash"

"I was not aware, I didn't realize I was in trouble." In 1936, Mella Wendell-Katznelson was just 10 years old, a youth born and raised in Warsaw, Poland, with 6 brothers and 3 sisters. She had always loved Poland. "Youth was very nice before the war; we played around as a kid in the yard and went to public school."

Mella recalled how she was notified that the war began: "We were not notified, only told through megaphones throughout the city." Mella was 13 years old when the war broke out in 1939. The Germans began bombarding cities, by sending bombs through Poland's sky. There was no warning that the war had begun, but in one week Poland had given up to Germany. Jews were being segregated. According to Mella, "They took the Jews and said 'Because you are Jewish, you can not live.'"

In 1941, she was sent to the Warsaw ghetto. "We had no warning about leaving, they just told us to pack." Life in the ghetto was difficult. Although Mella lived with her family, the adjustment was difficult. Every night, another one of her brothers wouldn't come home. There were Germans on the streets, catching Jews to work for them. They were taken to wash toilets and sent out of town and were paid nothing. Mella worked for a German factory sewing buttons for a company, Tevens. She describes this time by saying, "Life was rough, people were dying like flies." After a year in the ghetto, the Germans tricked the Jews by saying that everyone had to report to a train station with all their belongings. When they arrived at the train station, they had to leave all of their things and were forced everyone into trains like cattle, heading to the concentration camps. When they arrived at the camp, everyone was told to strip off their clothes, and then forced to shave their heads. "When we came to the camp, they made a selection - one way were the young ones and the other were the old ones." Mella was lucky to work in camps - many others were sent to the gas chambers to die. According to Mella, the concentration camp was much worse than the ghetto. "I was given a number on my arm when we first got there, my number is 48834." Throughout the four years, Mella was transported to four different camps- Majdanek, Birkenau, Auschwitz and Ravensbrueck. In Auschwitz, Mella worked in an ammunition factory checking bullets. There was little food to eat and no space. Everyday was the same. You had to wake up early to work, eat soup and a quarter of bread, go out to work and come home. "No one was thinking of social activities - only praying to survive by a miracle." There was nothing to say to each other. There was no practicing of religion. Mella explains, "That was the reason we were sent there and we didn't want to practice ceremonies. I survived by staying strong. I would go to the camp hospital and give them salami and margarine I received only on holidays in trade for their bread to keep me alive." Everyday they were counted and the women were separated from the men. Germans would make sure everyone was there. If someone was missing, everyone was forced to wait six to seven hours until everyone was

accounted for. While waiting in a line, they wore blue- and white-striped rags and wooden shoes with nothing else. Every week, workers were separated by strength - weak ones were sent to the gas chambers and new shipments of Jews from everywhere came in to work instead.

When the war ended in 1945, Mella said she "... had no feelings. I was happy to be alive, but I didn't have anything." Mella was 18 when she left the concentration camp. After the end of the war, she joined an institution that helped Holocaust survivors with the necessities, including clothing and food stamps. She found her older brother, David, who had escaped to Russia before the war broke out. She also met her husband and they moved to Canada for 8 years: "It took a couple years to get readjusted. We got a little house in Montreal and worked at a vegetable store." In 1960, they moved to San Francisco. Mella has returned three times to Poland since the war, but she did not recognize anything. "Poland streets are all different, built up by Russia. When I went back to where I used to live, the streets were not there, hotels instead. The Polish were very friendly and curious about who was still alive. They had acted as if nothing was wrong, when really they had helped Germans and they say they helped the Jews."

Assemblymember Gene Mullin
District 19



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Edith

Interviewed by Rachel Solomon

Hilde Gattmann

Interviewed by Adam Wexler

Hurst Sommer

Interviewed by Sydney Carteris

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Edith's parents, who were wealthy and had a booming business, immediately left Germany in 1933 when the Nazis came to power. As young idealistic people, they had been politically active and had resisted the Nazis. Her father made public speeches, assisted by her mother, warning the Jewish people (and others) of the Nazis and their rise to power. Opposing the Nazis was a crime as was being Jewish. For these two so-called crimes, they were considered double criminals and had been put on top of the "death-list."

Fearing for their lives, they immediately immigrated to the Netherlands. Knowing that being just over the border in Amsterdam was not far enough away from Germany to be safe, and that the Nazis would eventually occupy Holland and all the other neighboring countries, Edith's family tried to flee farther overseas -- to the USA.

However, the Nazis had declared them enemies of Germany and had not only confiscated their business, possessions and money, but had also taken away their nationality. Edith's parents were declared "stateless," which meant they were "non-persons," thus having no rights at all. Being deprived of civil rights and without an identity, they could not get a visa to go overseas. It was during those years before the war, between 1933 and 1940, that they finally resigned themselves to the inevitable.

Edith was born in Amsterdam (Holland) in 1938, as a human being without nationality. She was two years old when the war started in 1940. From the ages of two through seven, Edith spent her time in cellars and other hiding places in Amsterdam. She learned to stay quiet, not to cry, and to always be alert.

Edith is still disturbed, remembering the merciless pounding of the Gestapo during roundups, mostly at nighttimes: the screeching of cars, the loud shouting, the kicking in of doors and breaking windows, the desperate screaming of children and adults. What Edith remembers most and still haunts her today, are the numerous cruel scenes she witnessed. "Too many to mention them all here, because they fill an entire book," she says.

One of her first personal encounters with the German Nazis happened when she was about three years old. She was standing with her parents and a young Jewish couple that also shared her last name (although they were not related to her) in an entrance hall with white marble floors in a house located in the center of Amsterdam. Two Gestapo officers had entered. With loud voices, they started yelling at them. Edith could not understand the German words, but the men sounded and looked "tremendously evil." They especially yelled at her. She screamed back at them and started hitting them. It went back and forth. Eventually, with a heavy object, they knocked her down on the floor.

The episode has been vivid in Edith's memory: the violent shouting voices, the screams of the battered woman, and the sickening red blood that spread slowly out onto the white marble floor, "like an ever changing abstract painting." Then they threw the woman, like something disgusting, into a waiting car. "In loud voices, that sounded like angry barking dogs, they yelled at us to be ready, saying they would be right back to pick us all up".

Edith and her parents left the house right away, ending up in a dark, cold cellar. There were no windows and no furniture. "We only had a thin blanket on the hard and icy cold floor. There was a musty smell. Big brown and black rats were running around and over us" Edith says. "My hands and feet were stiff from the cold. The icy, moldy humidity crept through my body. Sometimes I didn't feel my body at all. It felt frozen. As bad as it was in that cellar, if we hadn't left the house in such great haste, it would have become a deadly trap for us. The murdered woman's husband, Mr. Levy, had not left; the Gestapo had come back and taken him away."

When Edith was five to six years old, she witnessed another incident that was difficult to forget. She had peeked through an opening in the wall, out to the street and saw a crowd of about 40 to 50 people. They were lined up stumbling through the street, being forced forward by the Gestapo, who shouted angrily and prodded them with their guns.

The people looked messy and dirty and had disheveled, long hair and beards. "They had large signs hanging around their necks with something written on them. My father read the signs aloud to me: 'These are your allies'. He explained to me that they apparently had been locked up somewhere for a long time, where they had been starved. They had not been allowed to use a bathroom for a long time and had defecated and urinated in their clothing. Herded to the end of the street they disappeared from our sight. Suddenly, we heard the rapid fire of machine guns. They were killing them."

Although Edith witnessed many horrors, she was also able to see that not all humans were evil. When Edith was about 5, the Gestapo unexpectedly came to her home and there was no time for her to hide under the floorboards. Eddie, the father of the family Edith was staying with at the time, ushered her up to the roof, as the Gestapo kicked down the door. He lifted her onto the neighboring rooftop and Edith successfully escaped. Eddie was caught and sent to a concentration camp where he spent the rest of the war. Edith and her family are forever grateful for his heroic actions.

The conditions in Amsterdam during the Nazi-German occupation were a hell in which hardly anyone could survive. Comparable to life in a ghetto, the Nazis started their frequent roundups and simultaneously weakened the entire population by starving them out. The Jews, who did not exist to the outside world, were not eligible for ration cards, which gave the non-Jewish population at least minimal rations of food at times when it was available. Many Jewish persons died in their hiding places or surrendered themselves to the Nazis, since they could not endure the isolation in their hiding conditions any

longer. From 1944 until 1945 when no food was available for anyone anymore, people everywhere “died like flies”.

The continuous deprivations and the starvation Edith and others in hiding in Amsterdam had endured had greatly diminished their strength. Edith’s situation had grown worse and worse. The benefactors in the underground had disappeared; they were already dead or were in concentration camps.

In May 1945, the war was over. The Canadians liberated Amsterdam and the Americans brought food and clothing. Both Edith and her father were so weak that they lost the ability to walk. Her mother always said that if the liberators had taken a few days longer, they all would have died. The Americans came in with care packages containing white bread and crushed pineapple. To 7-year-old Edith, this was a feast; the white bread, unseen to her before this time, tasted like cake and pineapple was like the Greek god’s ambrosia.

Though it came too late for too many, the feelings of joy and relief for the people who had survived the tortures were beyond words or explanation. Sick and starving people came to the surface, reduced to bundles of skeletons, but glowing all over with feelings of relief.

After enduring so much pain and hardship Edith says it was miraculous that she and her parents survived. Letter after letter arrived, over months and years stamped with the word dead in Dutch. Twenty-four of Edith’s relatives died in concentration camps. Edith felt amazed about the existence of people, who did not torture and destroy, but vibrated friendliness and warmth and brought food and clothing. She was in a constant state of astonishment and wonder. The deeply felt thankfulness about the liberators was an experience that ---like all the horrors--- has also been deeply engraved in Edith’s system. It gave Edith some hope, that there might be something on this planet other than violence, hate, murder and torture. But the end of the war, however, did not end the effects of Nazi atrocities.

The Holocaust left a lasting mark on Edith. She became independent at a young age and continued to live as if she would be dead the next day. Edith spent the rest of her life in many countries, including Israel, and enjoyed working on her own radio show and being a teacher. She finally made it to the United States in 1992 and settled in the Bay Area. Edith survived the Holocaust and wants to continue telling her story.

Hilde Gattmann

By Adam Wexler

Before Hitler's ascension to power, most Germans lived in relative harmony with others of different religious backgrounds. For Hilde Gattmann of Wuerzburg, Bavaria, Germany, the situation was no less and no more dangerous than anywhere else in Europe at that time, and the idea that such unity could dissolve into racism was unthinkable.

Hilde grew up in an environment of religious diversity. She attended a Jewish Kindergarten, but always had some non-Jewish friends. Her girlfriend Traude who lived in the same apartment house, went with her to the Kindergarten, learned the Hebrew songs and prayers together, and at home they shared Hanukah and Christmas times - until 1933. Then Traude's father put on his Nazi uniform and the girls were not allowed to ever play together or greet each other again. Hilde lost all her neighborhood playmates.

Hilde's father and his brother co-owned an iron and machine business which provided a comfortable living for the family. When Hilde was six years old, Hitler seized power in Germany and everything changed. The Nazis imposed new Anti-Semitic laws that limited Jew's freedoms, laws that dictated that Jews could no longer attend movies, concerts or plays or even listen to the radio. Even so, Hilde's next-door neighbors continued to treat their Jewish neighbors with kindness, and, despite its illegality, her father continued to listen to the radio in order to stay informed.

He noticed the alarming progression of anti-Semitism within Germany, and wanted to escape Europe completely. Things began to spiral out of control. Everything fell under suspicion and Hilde's father was called in to be interrogated by the Gestapo. Her family recognized that things were not going to improve, and decided to leave the country while it was still possible. They sold the business under duress; Hilde's father was approached just before midnight and was told, "Our price or no price."

A relative who was already living in the United States was able to help get visas for the family, making it possible for them to travel to America. They packed a crate of their belongings, which was supervised by Nazis, who charged exorbitant prices for that privilege. The family was only allowed to bring the equivalent of about \$5.00 per person. The departure was quick and well hidden, so as not to attract unwelcome attention.

When they crossed the border into France, the family was strip-searched by Nazi officials, a traumatizing experience for the eleven year old Hilde. They were in Paris when the German Embassy official was shot, the incident that was the pretext for Kristallnacht (Crystal Night), and the beginning of widespread violent anti-Semitic action. On that fated day, November 9, 1938, Hilde's family caught a ship, called the "Il de France" at the harbor in Le Havre. The voyage lasted one week on high seas, in which Hilde connected with the other Jewish children on board who had also suffered from Nazi abuse. When the ship finally sailed up the Hudson River and Hilde caught sight of the

Statue of Liberty, her emotions were so intense that she remembers them to this day. It was a feeling of total elation.

Met by Hilde's aunt and uncle, she and her brother went to stay with them until the family could afford to live together. Within the first week, her mother found work as a nurse. Their belongings arrived two months later, much to their surprise. Hilde and her brother attended a foreigner's class in the New York school system until they learned more English and were placed in their regular classes. Despite the difficulty, at home the language became English so that parents could improve their language skills; only when someone came to visit who could not speak the language would they return to their birth language.

On arrival, telegrams were waiting for them, from relatives left behind. Hilde's father made every effort to rescue the families, including her grandmother but it was too late, they lost 15 member of their family in the Holocaust. That is why Hilde is currently working as an interviewer for the Holocaust Oral History Project of the Holocaust Center of Northern California.

Hilde has always remembered how lucky she and her family were, to come to this country and all the good people who were so helpful. She and her husband Eric have a good life, two great and caring daughters with lovely families of their own and 9 grandchildren.

Hurst Sommer

By Sydney Carteris

The Shoe Tree

Born in July 1927, Hurst Sommer began his life in Breslauer, Germany, not knowing the hardships and obstacles he would soon face. He lived with his mother and younger brother until 1933 when Adolf Hitler came to power. At this point, his mother lost her job at the department store she worked at in Berlin. His mother, Elsie, like many Jews at this time was not allowed to work in non-Jewish firms and she was put out of a job. With two young sons to support she was left with no choice but to put Hurst's brother, Henry, in a foster home and Hurst into an orphanage. Hurst was only six years old when he began to experience the horrors of Nazi Germany beginning with the frightful night known as Kristallnacht. As he describes it, the Nazis attempted to storm through the front and back doors of his orphanage and all of the children were rushed to the top floor of the building only hearing the soldiers trying to break through and his teacher's words, "These are only children." Thankfully the Nazis retreated, but the memories of that night still haunt Hurst everyday.

Prior to Hurst being put in the orphanage, his mother and her boyfriend at that time, Fritz Sommer, had received word that he needed to flee Germany. Hurst's soon-to-be step-father was being questioned by the Gestapo regarding his involvement in Moscow and suspicion that he might have been a Jewish spy. With fear for his life, Fritz planned to leave Germany as soon as possible. Hurst describes this process as "their luck." Fritz was on his way out when he was stopped by an SS soldier who had recognized him from grammar school. He gave Fritz a tip to get out of Germany right away: if he had money, he should go to Shanghai because it was the only known place where visas weren't required for entry. The next day Fritz married Hurst's mother and three days later they left for Shanghai together. Elsie had a cousin that was a Jewish attorney and he promised her that he would eventually get her sons out to Shanghai.

In order for Fritz and Elsie to keep money, they had to hide it. Germans were trained to tear apart clothing and shoes in search for hidden money. Jews were not allowed to bring more than ten marks out of the country with them. If any money was found, they were shot without question. Fritz was smarter than that and discovered a way to hide mass amounts of money without the Nazis finding it. He rolled his money into the springs of his shoe trees that he would put in his shoes. While on the boat to Shanghai he carefully ironed out the money he has stuffed into his shoe trees so it looked presentable to exchangers that he would meet at the shores of Shanghai. Hurst calls this "their survival." With this money Fritz was able to start a life for him and his wife.

For the next six months, Hurst remained alone in the orphanage as his rights as a Jew slowly vanished. He was no longer able to leave the facility to go to the bakery or to walk around town. He was confined to the company of his teachers and his daily

repetitive schedule. He watched as the Jewish community around him crumbled at the hands of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. It was not until the war ended that Hurst discovered the evils that occurred while he was in Shanghai. All of the newspapers were censored and Jews were not allowed to have radios. He had no knowledge of the millions of Jews around Europe including a lot of his family and friends that were killed in the concentration camps set up by the Nazis.

Finally, at age 12, Hurst was taken out of the orphanage and he and his brother started their journey to reunite with their parents in Shanghai. They took a train out of Germany to the border of Italy and from there a boat from Italy to Shanghai. Their trip lasted for three long weeks, and they were sealed up in a train car with lots of other people. Most of the people on the train had definite plans for themselves once they got to Shanghai and were put on the outskirts of the ghetto. Hurst and his brother were picked up by a private rickshaw and taken to the apartment where their parents resided, in a ghetto in Shanghai. They were able to receive this special treatment because of the money that their step-father had brought over and continued to make in Shanghai.

While having money was comforting, life in the ghetto was not as pleasant. Hurst and his three family members all had to share one room and live in a small apartment. Food was rationed to each person in the ghetto, averaging about one ounce of butter per week. Although it didn't serve to be very satisfying, they saw it as being better than their fate would have been back in Germany. There were about 20,000 other Jews living in this ghetto because all Jews were confined to one living space. The living situations were "very tense" and the Jews living in the ghettos were subject to such horrors as air raids and bomb droppings. Hurst and Henry were able to attend a British school within their ghetto and became fluent in English and very well educated. Hurst was also very involved in the Zionist movement within his community. "All of the teens belonged to some group whether it be boy scouts, chess clubs or the Zionist movement. They wanted to belong to them to belong to something."

World War II ended in 1945, but Hurst and his family continued to live in the ghetto until 1947. Hurst made his living as a young adult in the ghetto working as an electrician's apprentice. After the war ended he started working with the U.S. embassy. He held several jobs while working there including ranks in the air force and in the government. This is what eventually got him to America.

When Hurst was 18 years old he was offered the chance to go to America and within three days he and his family were on their way to relatives in San Francisco. He immediately found a job through the Jewish Family Service and continued to work there until he was drafted into the army in December of 1950 where he was sent to Korea to fight for the United States. Upon his return he attended UC Berkley and to this day is still involved in government affairs and the Zionist movement. Hurst has made a wonderful life for himself even through all of the battles he faced in his past and is someone that we all can admire.

Assemblymember Pedro Nava
District 35



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Azriel Kurlaender

Interviewed by Teague Savitch

Anne Rubin

Interviewed by Teague Savitch

Sandor Vador

Interviewed by Teague Savitch

The following story is contributed from "Portraits of Survival," a permanent collection of contemporary portraits, biographical histories and archival material depicting the lives of Santa Barbara area residents who are survivors and refugees of the Holocaust and whose stories are provided here.

Regine Pringle

Portraits of Survival: Life Journeys During the Holocaust and Beyond

A permanent exhibit in photography sponsored by

Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara ~ located at

Bronfman Family Jewish Community Center

524 Chapala Street

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Azriel Kurlaender

By Teague Savitch

Against All Odds

Azriel Kurlaender was six years old and infected with tuberculosis when he was liberated by the Russians at Auschwitz, Poland in January of 1945. His name, age, and "Jew" were written in mud on his clothes, serving as his only identification when the Allied troops came.

This story of how a parentless six year old survived Auschwitz and made a life for himself is a miraculous tale of hope when against all odds. Today, Azriel lives in Ventura, California, working as an international consultant in food technology, and specializes in avocados. He shares his story of surviving the Holocaust out of his great wish that the horrors of history never occur again.

Azriel believes he was born on September 17, 1939 in the Polish village of Wizna. He cannot remember his parents and knows that neither survived internment. Azriel's earliest memories consist of flashes of a woman, Pola, who saved him from the Nazis.

Pola Nyomkin was not more than twenty when she made the heroic decision to hide Azriel. She found Azriel at the beginning of internment in a labor camp at Wiezbnik. There she knew the Nazis would have no use for a boy so young, who could not work. Risking everything, she became his guardian and hid him from the Nazis for the remainder of the Holocaust. The discipline necessary for a child to remain concealed and silent 23 1/2 hours of the day with an empty stomach is inconceivable. Hiding under floors and beds and eating meager meals in silence was only part of Azriel's story of survival at Wiezbnik and Auschwitz - the rest lacks explanation short of a miracle.

Azriel remembers hiding when the Russians came. Pola was forced into the death march towards Berlin and was incapable of looking after Azriel any longer. She instructed him to stay behind and hide there at Auschwitz until the Allies came. When they came, he appeared as one of the youngest of survivors, with his name, age, and "Jew" written in mud on his clothing.

Azriel would never again see Pola. He was taken to a Polish clinic to be treated and would spend the next year there recovering from tuberculosis. In November 1946, Azriel was adopted from an orphanage in Krakow, Poland by the Freedman family in London. This new life for Azriel lasted only until a list of survivors was released. Relatives in Israel discovered him and pressed for Azriel to be with them.

Soon after arriving in Israel, however, it became apparent that his relatives lacked the means to care for him. A kibbutz, an agricultural communal settlement, with kids

from a variety of countries, would become home to Azriel for the remainder of his childhood. There he would raise himself without parents, family, or Pola.

From 1949 to 1960, less his two and a half years of military service, Azriel lived at this kibbutz. There he learned about fruit groves and applied his skills to qualify for a job managing fruit groves. During his free time, he studied for his entrance exams to a local university. With help from a former teacher in the kibbutz, Azriel heard about the opportunity to study Food Science at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

As a 25-year-old freshman at Cal Poly, Azriel already had plans to return to Israel with his degree and start his own venture. In 1969, Azriel returned to Israel with his degree. Soon after, he got married, had children, and founded one of Israel's first frozen food processing companies. Azriel eventually came to Ventura County for a job with Calavo in 1980. He now acts as a consultant to those who want to set up processing plants internationally.

Azriel's lived his life against the odds. He is alive today, with the opportunity chance to be with his wife and watch their three children and two grandchildren grow, is a true story of hope in spite of histories deepest pains. Azriel's great wish is that mankind learn from its egregious mistakes, and that all future generations may live in freedom and harmony.

Thank you, Azriel Kurlaender, for your profound belief in the power of story telling. May your story help us to always remember your great wish.

Anne Rubin

By Teague Savitch

A Childhood Cut Short for a Chance at Life

The day freedom was taken from her, Anne Rubin was 10 years old. Often referred to as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, on November 9, 1938 across Germany, Jewish men were arrested, women and children were placed under house arrest, and Synagogues and Jewish storefronts were looted and destroyed. For Anne and her family, they would fear this night may well be their last.

Today Anne enjoys life in Ventura, California as a retired nurse and grandmother. She hopes that her story and the stories of all who survived the Holocaust can serve to promote harmony for all future generations.

Anne was born in Coburg, Germany on November 28, 1927 as the youngest of three. She describes her early years of a standard middle class upbringing as one fraught with systemic anti-Semitism. By 1936 Anne remembers her teacher telling her she was no longer welcome in school. For the 40 Jewish families living in Coburg and Jews across Germany, life was conducted as second class citizens.

Some would leave safely before the war to destinations like America hoping for a better life, including Anne's uncle and oldest brother Peter. The truth, as Anne remembers it however, is that nobody had any idea how fast life would become dangerous for the Jews in Germany.

Already banned from public school, Anne and her brother Frank were walking to Coburg's provisional Jewish school the day of Kristallnacht. On their way they were interrupted by SS uniforms and ordered home. At home they were met by more SS soldiers rounding up all the Jewish families in Coburg.

Anne recalls being marched from her home to the center of town. There she remembers being gathered and put on display around town for all to heckle and curse at. After some time the men were gathered into a gym and women and children were ordered home.

Frantic and without a sense of what might happen next, the Jewish women of Coburg decided they should attempt to bring food and supplies to their men. Anne recalls being selected with a few other young girls for delivering supplies past the SS guards to their fathers and brothers. There, Anne remembers seeing her father cry for the first time. On the floor of this gym, incarcerated, grown men were delivered basic supplies by their own daughters too young to be afraid or aware of the danger ahead.

Anne and the family would soon separate without knowing if they would ever again be together. Anne's father fought with the German Army in World War I, a fact that became known to the SS soldiers and used by Anne's father to curry their favor and escape detention. By this time it was now decided that the men in Anne's family had to leave Germany. Not yet threatened for internment themselves, women were committed to getting their men out of the country first.

For Anne and her mother this meant staying behind to move in with their grandmother and await their chance. Anne's family, like most, lacked the necessary means to evacuate the entire family together. It wasn't long, however, before Anne was able to board the kindertransport, a Jewish sponsored evacuation train to England. Eventually, separated from her mother for the first time, Anne would join her brother Frank in the growing Jewish refugee community in England. At the age of eleven, now faced with the task of being her own mother in a strange place speaking a strange language, Anne remembers becoming an adult.

Anne's mother would escape two weeks before war was declared in 1939. She was likely one of the last Jews to make it out of Germany alive. For those that stayed behind, like Anne's grandmother, they would soon fall victim to the beginning of the Nazi killing machine. For the next year Anne's family would be refugees in England. Anne and her brother Frank were sent to a boarding school at Folkstone, a school converted for refugee children. Without work Anne's father could not support Anne and her brother. So Anne and her brother remained in the refugee community while their parents, thanks to the financial support from a relative in Texas, had a small single room unit outside the camp.

Finally in April of 1940, with the help of the Jewish Refugee Committee, Anne and her family were united and boarded a ship promising freedom. Arriving into the Boston Harbor on the Anniversary of Paul Revere's Ride, they were welcomed with a spectacle and celebration. Ending up in Columbus, Ohio extended relatives took them in and helped Anne's family adjust and began their new lives.

By 1952 Anne had graduated from Ohio State University with a nursing degree and married her husband. In 1954 Anne and her new family moved to California where her husband's engineering job with the Navy eventually brought them to Ventura County. Anne has remained a resident of Ventura ever since.

Anne's experience escaping Nazi Germany is one she hopes nobody will ever have to face. As long as history repeats itself Anne believes it is important to share the stories of holocaust survivors to remind us all of what is in our history.

Thank you, Anne Rubin, for your strong desire to insure harmony for all future generations.

Sandor Vador

By Teague Savitch

A Walk to a New Life

On April 5th 1945, Sandor Vador survived the Holocaust. As Russian troops approached the Nazi labor camp where he was being held, Sandor walked towards his new life. Today, Sandor is an 83 year old Hungarian-born American, residing in Ventura, California. He spends much of his time volunteering with the Oncology Infusion Center of Ventura County Medical Center and continues to receive community recognition for his dedication to volunteerism.

Sandor was born into a Jewish family in Paks, Hungary on May 23, 1925. By the age of ten, Sandor moved with his mother, father, and younger sister to Rakospolata, near Budapest, searching for greater opportunities. The Vadors' met with many of the same hardships of being Jewish they faced prior to moving. By the late 1930s, institutional discrimination against Jewish people was common place. The Hungarian government began accelerating laws to curtail the livelihoods of Jews. Even with Sandor's early talents in mechanical engineering, an anti-Jewish quota system excluded him from a formal education.

In these same years, Sandor's father worked as a playwright and, later, department manager of the largest textile company in Hungary. These jobs and opportunities soon dried up because of his Jewish heritage. Despite the growing examples of government-sanctioned discrimination against the Hungarian Jewish population, few, if any, anticipated what soon followed.

On March 19, 1944, Germany occupied Hungary, assuming complete control over the population. By June 1944, the internment and systematic mass killing of Hungarian Jews began and so too did the story of Sandor Vador's survival of the Holocaust.

Some Jewish families living in Budapest proper were able to obtain protective documents issued by foreign diplomats - the Vadors were not so lucky. Both Sandor and his father were forced into slave labor; they were the fortunate ones. All other Hungarian Jews, men outside this age group and all women, including Sandor's mother and sister, were sent to a concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. Sandor's mother was killed on arrival and his sister was selected to work.

Sandor's group and his father's group were sent independently to an oil refinery. For nine weeks they did force labor in the same camp. Then the labor force of Sandor's camp was quickly transitioned to fortifying the Eastern front against an approaching Russian army and Sandor was taken to Santa Ana am Aigen. He would not see his father again until after the war. While at the oil refinery, the Danube had provided at least some outlet for hygiene

At Santa Ana am Aigen, however, the health conditions were dire and many at the camp didn't make it to liberation. Soon many came down with typhoid, including Sandor. Sandor was infected with typhoid and left to die in his barracks by the retreating German army. The Russian army came to liberate him.

On the day of liberation, April 5th, 1945, near death, Sandor began walking towards home. The hope of reuniting with his family and starting a new life gave him strength enough to reach a Russian field hospital two kilometers away where Sandor received food and the opportunity to rest. The next day, Sandor and others boarded a Russian supply train that would pass through Budapest.

After staying with family and recovering from typhoid, Sandor began work as a tool room machinist in Budapest, and met his wife not long after. Together, Sandor and his wife started a new family. They vowed to each other to provide their two children with lives free from persecution and the anti-Semitism that was still widespread in Hungary after the war. For the next ten years, Sandor's dedicated his efforts to this, and after receiving his university degree in engineering, and the opportunity came to move, Sandor and his family left for the United States in 1956.

Today Sandor is retired and committed to volunteerism. Sandor believes his survival of the Holocaust has instilled in him a deep desire to give his help to those in need. Spending much of his time with patients in the Oncology Infusion Center of the Ventura County Medical Center, Sandor has touched many lives.

Thank you, Sandor Vandor, for your courage, strength, and inspiration to all future generations.

Regine Pringle

I have come to realize that one of my most precious possessions is my memories. Some I have embraced throughout my whole life, while others I have consciously suppressed. After being on this earth over three quarters of a century, I recognize that I must try to recollect the bad just as much as the good memories as they both had a profound impact on my life.

I was born in Nancy, France, October 28, 1930, the third of four daughters. My father, Henri Braun, and mother, Francoise, both from Poland, came to France where they eventually met and were married. I had two older sisters, Marie-Eve and Helene, and one younger, Violette. We lost Helene to diphtheria when she was only four. My oldest sister relocated to Israel after World War II, where she died at the age of 64. Violette still lives in Nancy with her husband and two children.

I know very little about my parents' early life. I don't even know their actual date of birth. One is not given important details during the first ten years of their lives. What I do know is that during this short time, I always felt loved and secure.

I remember a large two-room apartment; no hot water, no bathroom. I remember a large, bright looking kitchen, where we spent most of our time. My fondest memories are about the kitchen, where we spent most of our time. My fondest memories about the kitchen, is a rectangular table, always covered with a colorful cloth, where my mother prepared the Shabbat meals. I would stand fright by her side watching her every move, and, many times, she would let me help her knead the dough for the Challah (braided egg bread specifically used during Friday evening service), roll some more dough for noodles, and, best of all, help mix ingredients for a delicious dessert. She loved to sing and taught us songs in various languages.

I adored my father. He was very proud of his "princesses." He would take us one at a time, for long walks, or to the corner pub where we would sit on his lap while he'd be conversing with his friends. He made each one of us feel very special.

To me those were good times, despite the fact that we were being mistreated by some neighbors, who would call us "Sale Juif" (dirty Jew) and often by our school teachers and classmates. I always knew that when I came home, mother would be greeting me with a big hug and I would almost forget the transgressions of the day.

World War II changed all that. First we had to deal with the constant bombing of Nancy, sometimes staying in our assigned shelter for days at a time. In 1940, just before the Germans invaded Nancy, most of its residents left for safer surroundings. We moved to a tiny village called "Les Poiriers."

When the Germans invaded France, they divided the country into two sections: Occupied France and Free France. Unfortunately, since our little town was located in the occupied side, it was not long before the Germans invaded it. In July of 1941, the German Gestapo apprehended us from our home. They ruthlessly shoved us into a covered truck, already filled with other Jewish families, and took us to a French concentration camp, on the outskirts of the city of Poitiers. Although there were German soldiers in and around the camps, the camp director was French.

Over three hundred people were cramped into three wooden barracks with straw mattresses spread on each side, our only convenience; very little food and clothing. I remember roll call early every morning, sometimes in the middle of the day, when we would have to stand up straight and be quiet for hours. Yet, besides always being hungry and, in the winter, always cold, I don't remember being too sad or scared. I had the comfort of being with my loving parent.

In December 1941, the "Acting Government" authorized the French interned children to leave the concentration camp. With the exception of ten children, they were allowed to move out of the area and join relatives who were not yet held captive. My two sisters went to Paris where they stayed with an aunt. I was one of the remaining ten (never learned the real reason). In January of 1942, the government consented to let us out. However, we had to remain in the vicinity of the concentration camp where we were placed with Jewish families. I lived in Poitiers with Mr. and Mme. Prager and their three children. I had never met them before.

From that time on, life became a nightmare. So much has been bottled up all these years; other incidents just keep popping up: The Jewish people were not allowed out in the streets without the yellow "Jewish Star" showing prominently on their clothing, and they could not shop during the day, only during a couple of hours in the evening, "Jew curfew hours." By that time, even with food stamps, there was usually nothing left in the stores. On many occasions, Mme. Prager would give me a shopping list assuring me it was safe for me to go out without the Jewish Star. "With your straight blond hair and blue eyes, the Germans will never guess you're Jewish," she said. Telling her I was scared did not help. I would venture out, singing and skipping, hoping the Gestapo, seeing me acting carefree, would not suspect that I was Jewish.

In July of 1942, the Gestapo issued an edict for the arrest of all the Jewish people in the area. Mr. Prager made immediate plans to escape to Free France. The border between both regions was separated by two rows of barbed wire, and well guarded. With the help of two French guides, we eventually managed to get through. At that point, the Prager family, who had thankfully brought me to escape along with them, left me with relatives and went their own way.

The period between July 1942 and May 1944 was the most harrowing time of my existence. I was constantly fleeing from the Germans who, by then, had occupied all of France. I was separated from my family and forced to hide in many places: a convent, an orphanage, a farm, another orphanage, another farm. Oh, so many places. Always alone.

If not for the aid and support of some wonderful Christian people, mostly strangers, I could not have survived. Finally, with the help of the United Jewish Joint Distribution, I found myself in Toulouse (near the border of Spain), in the home of a lady only known as "Mademoiselle Giselle." Imaging my joy when, among the children already there, I saw my cousin Charles! Besides Charles, there were seven boys approximately my age, and one four-year old boy, Uri. I did not feel so abandoned any more. Although we were still hiding, I could now use my real name in the presence of everyone in the house. I was the only girl in the group. Mlle. Giselle genuinely showed her appreciation for my help. She would always ask me to sing and entertain, something I had been doing since I was a little girl, even in concentration camp.

Much to my chagrin, I did not stay there long. The Joint Distribution had made arrangements to smuggle us to Spain. We crossed the Pyrenees (mountains between France and Spain). In two separate groups. I was in the first group with Charles, Uri and two other boys. We could not take any identification with us. Mlle. Giselle hid a photograph of my mother in one shoulder pad of my coat and a passport picture of my father in the other (the only pictures I possessed). It was my responsibility to watch over Uri until we reached Spain. Mlle. Giselle gave me specific instructions never to lose sight of Uri, and handed me two chocolate bars exclusively for him. I was careful to dole out the chocolate, a piece at a time. To this day, I wonder if the chocolate might possibly have had any effect on his behavior; Uri never complained during the whole ordeal. There were some frightening episodes crossing the mountains, but we finally arrived safely in Barcelona. Eventually, our small group increased to forty-five boys and girls, all under the age of fifteen.

We lived in large villa, on the outskirts of Barcelona. There, I met the second person I shall never forget, Mlle. Seccera. Mlle. Seccera was Spanish Catholic nurse who had lost her family and fiancé in the Franco Spanish war. She had offered her services to the Jewish Joint Distribution and was devoted to all the children. As with Mlle. Giselle, her selfless, compassionate disposition made me feel that she really cared about me. There was a very special aura of camaraderie among the children. For eight months, we lead a pretty normal life. We attended school again, participated in the Jewish Holidays and created our own entertainment. I was the soloist.

I was disheartened when it all came to an end, in January of 1945. Everyone, with the exception of four children, left for the South of Spain, at which point they were to embark for Israel. One boy, Gerard, was to remain in Barcelona until he could return to his native country, England. I never heard from them again. My cousin Charles, a boy named Maurice, and I set out for Lisbon, Portugal, where we lived with Jewish families for three months, until a Portuguese ship, the "Quanza," finally agreed to take us to the United States.

We landed in Philadelphia in April 1945. We spoke no English. Someone from the Joint Distribution was waiting for us and took Charles and me to an orphanage in Newark, New Jersey. We remained there until my Uncle Max, brother of my mother, was located and notified of our arrival. My uncle and his family, not having been forewarned

of our arrival, were shocked. What's more, although he knew of Charles' existence, Uncle Max has never been informed of my mother's marriage to my father, let alone that she had daughters.

From the time I left the concentration camp, every decision regarding my destiny was made for me, including coming to the United States; and even after I arrived. In 1947, when my cousin Charles was going back to France to join his parents who had survived the war, I pleaded to return with him so I could be reunited with my two sisters. The answer was "No." Again, I had no say in the matter. By that time, my four surviving aunts in France felt certain my dear parents had not survived "Auschwitz." They decided that my American uncle owed it to my mother to share responsibility of one of her daughters' upbringing. Even my sisters showed no interest in a reunion. I felt completely abandoned by those I thought loved me. I was so hurt that I vowed never to return to France. I became an American citizen as soon as I turned twenty-one.

Being an orphan is a challenge in itself. Getting to know a new family, new country, new language, different customs, complicates life even more. It certainly was not easy, and I could have never made it without the encouragement of many wonderful people, family and strangers. Yet, I strongly feel that what helped me most during my life are the beautiful memories I have of my childhood with my parents.

As I look back, I am glad my aunts decided not to let me return to France. The shy, skinny child who came to the United States at the age of fourteen has evolved into a happy mother of four great children three girls and one boy, and nine grandchildren. I am also fortunate to have been married to two very good men, and to have accumulated many good friends through the years.

In 1979, when one of my daughters received a Rotary Club Scholarship to study in France for one year, I took my first trip to my native country, and to Israel, and was reunited with my sisters and relatives. It was a very emotional experience. After the five-week visit, I returned even more appreciative of my adopted Country.

Assemblymember Anthony Portantino
District 44



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Zahava Sweet

Interviewed by Hilary Low

Acknowledgements

Congregation Shaarei Torah

Zahava Sweet

By Hilary Low

The Eternal Flame

Do ghosts live there,
in our house
on Rogowska Street?
Do they torment the living
with long fingers of memory?
All these piles of bones,
disintegrated.
No one knows where.
There are no graves to sit by.
from “Rogowska Street” by Zahava Sweet

During May of 1930, a charming young child was born in Poland. Her parents named her Zahava, “golden” in Hebrew. True to her name, she has lived a treasured life—a life full of memories, full of history; a life of bravery and freedom. Zahava Sweet is no ordinary woman; she is a Holocaust survivor and a wonderful poet.

It was 1939 when the Nazis occupied Poland and entered Zahava’s house in Brzeziny, Poland. She was nine at the time, scared for her family and frightened for her life. The Germans had occupied Brzeziny for three days. Within that time, two soldiers in gray uniforms with armed rifles entered her house and took all her family’s valuables, especially Zahava’s satin Purim dress made by her mother. “This will be for my daughter, my little Helga,” said the soldier as he stored it under his arm. Too terrified to protest, her family let the soldiers ransack their home as they soon moved into a small ghetto right outside their town.

For a year, Zahava’s family lived in the Brzeziny ghetto, a fenced area away from their homes and everything comfortable. Zahava slept with her sister in her old crib with her mother, father, grandparents, aunts, and uncles in the same room. Their food was rationed and they received stamp cards for their food. Little was available for them to eat—mainly flour, bread, and sugar. Zahava fell in love with poetry when she and her sister were taught Jewish poetry by a neighbor, eventually learning German as well. After a year, Zahava’s family was broken up. She was sent to a larger ghetto, Lodz, with her grandma and aunt where they stayed for four years. They were then required to travel to an all women’s concentration camp when the ghetto was liquidated.

In the concentration camp called Ravensbruck, Zahava was sent to work at a factory producing airplane parts from 4 a.m. until dark. It was now 1945. The nights were long and cold, as she only received one piece of bread and one cup of water or soup every day. She slept in barracks with no heat and no blankets. Life was dreary and

tedious; there was no time for fun or relaxation. All the women in the camp were forced to sing German songs exclaiming that Germany was above all, further humiliating the workers. Zahava only showered once a month and lice was abundant. Working in a striped white jumper, her stay at the concentration camp seemed longer than it really was.

You told me
The Gestapo would kill us all
before the war's end.
Herr Meister,
you promised to hide me
in your cellar.
from "Der Meister" by Zahava Sweet

The concentration camp was not completely filled with stone hearts. Zahava's first supervisor, the Herr Meister, was particularly nice and caring to her. He allowed her to wash her only undergarment under the table with water warmed by a torch when she worked. He brought her tidbits of cookie, chocolate candy, and pieces of banana which she ate in the bathroom so no one would find her. This man told Zahava that her people would all be killed, but he would hide her in his cellar so she would be safe. He even made her a little barrette for her hair. Had anyone found out about this man helping or even talking to Zahava, the both of them would have been severely punished. Eventually, he disappeared towards the end of the war. Zahava worried he was taken away because of his kindness, but she is forever grateful for the warmth of his heart and his extension of his compassion.

You survived death,
but there is another death that follows you.
We come back
to the world of living,
to those who can't bear
to look us in the eyes.
from "Survivor" by Zahava Sweet

Liberation in 1945 was a day of happiness for Zahava. Weeks prior, the women began to recognize German soldiers slowly leaving—less and less soldiers were stationed at the camp. When a Russian soldier entered their barracks on liberation day, he immediately told the women to run over the hill and into their future to guarantee not getting caught by the Germans again. Jubilant, Zahava and her friends first left their raggedy striped garments and put on clean clothes, then traveled back to Poland. Zahava and three friends were given a house two weeks after liberation and stocked it full of food. Hunger was a distant memory as they ate as much as they could and didn't care about the repercussions (diarrhea). Zahava was now free from bondage, yet she will forever hold the memories of her experiences. She no longer submitted to any restraints; she had earned her freedom. This past had died and a new life was born.

What will we do
with all this freedom?
Run in the street?
Taste the sun?
Chase the wind
go to the store
to smell fat sausages
and cheeses?
from "On the Way Back to Poland, 1945" by Zahava Sweet

Zahava was no longer afraid, no longer terrified by soldiers and men with guns. She was free and nothing was going to take away that feeling. This young girl now felt as if she could face anything. Her freedom was the ticket to open doors and opportunities for the rest of her life. Freedom additionally lay before Zahava as she luckily found her father and sister as a matter of chance at a train station in Poland. Her father was a well known suit manufacturer. Eventually the market for suits declined in Poland and their now family of three traveled to Berlin. Zahava wanted to exercise her freedom, so she emigrated to Israel. She experienced the founding of Israel and its independence war. The war was frightening, however, as Zahava received a scar from its bombings.

After several years, Zahava immigrated to the United States to reunite with her father and sister. They moved to Highland Park, California where the lifestyle was extremely different from her customary life. She comments that in California, "People are different—they always change their clothes every day. You cannot wear the same clothes every day." She attended Cal State Los Angeles and graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Child Development. Zahava also wrote poems to express her emotional experiences and later moved to Washington state for three years to publish a book of poems, titled "The Return of Sound" (Bombshelter Press, 2005).

Although no one from her immediate family from Poland is alive today, Zahava's story extends to cover their memorials. She suffered the greatest loss of her life during World War II. It was the loss of her mother. She still misses her mother very much. With two grandchildren ages eight and eleven, she tells her tale of survival in hopes they come to appreciate their privileged lives. This independent woman realizes that it was her faith and strong will that allowed her to overcome her difficult situations. She now lives in the happiness of her freedom with the warmth of her family surrounding her.

Together,
we make a team.
One who has gone
through the trials of life,
and the other
just beginning
on a starlit path.
from "Starla" by Zahava Sweet

Assemblymember Mary Salas
District 79



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Lilly Hecht

Interviewed by Evrin Peavy

Lilly Hecht

By Evrin Peavy

The Story of Lilly Hecht

Lilly Hecht's given name at birth was Lilia Rosenfeld. Her family name is Rosenfeld Stern. She was born in Czechoslovakia, near the border of Hungary on March 5th, 1925 and lived in Hungary until 1947 when she moved to Mexico. However, what she experienced while living in Hungary in the 1930s is something so terrifying and very difficult for her to explain. This is her story.

Lilly Hecht was raised in Hungary in a rather large community, a Jewish community that was very united and very calm. Her father owned a Singer sewing machine franchise and her mother worked at home. She lived with both of her parents and her brother. Her entire family lived in Hungary ever since she can remember. She had many aunts and uncles and her family was very observant by keeping a kosher home, celebrating all Jewish holidays such as Hanukkah and attending the synagogue during major holidays and large parties. She also attended evangelical school where they never had any problems until the war began.

In 1933, Lilly Hecht sensed the danger conveyed by Adolf Hitler and Nazism. She sensed the tension among the Jews and non-Jews was on the rise and all she could feel was panic, terror and desperation. She was forced to wear the yellow Star of David. In addition, her father's business was shut down and her mother lost her job. At this point, she was not able to attend school any longer and her entire family's property had been confiscated.

Lilly remembers being forced out of her home and being forced to a ghetto first, and then to the camp in Auschwitz. She also points out that the media never notified her or anyone around her about having to leave their homes. The only personal belongings she was able to take with her were a few garments of clothing, but they ended up taking that away as well. She remembers having to walk to a ghetto, and after that they transported everyone in the wagons that they used to transport animals.

Once she arrived at the ghetto, the sight was difficult to take in. No words can clearly describe what she witnessed as she was brought and taken into the ghetto. There were people on top of one another and it was just absolute turmoil and complete chaos within the Auschwitz camp. They were hardly ever given anything to eat, and the soup that they did give to them was just awful.

Auschwitz was an extermination camp. When she arrived in Auschwitz that was the last time she saw her father. Her mother was still with her but they both had to pretend that they didn't know each other because they were killing anyone who they knew had any relation to one another. She also recalls being dragged into the gas

chamber once. The day she was put in the gas chamber, the gas chamber was not working but all she could think about was "It's a pity they didn't kill me." She didn't know much about what was going on throughout the rest of Europe during this time because there was no communication with the outside world.

On May 6, 1945 the Russians came but they were not any better than the Germans. After Auschwitz, Lilly Hecht was transported to a bomb factory in Czechoslovakia. Everyone who was taken to that factory was put to work without any protection. They were now under Czech rule. The only thing they were feeding them at this point was a small cup of milk, and that was only if they noticed that you had blue lips, and very rarely you were given a hot shower. After working in the bomb factory, everyone was transported by foot to another camp called Terezienstadt camp which Hitler created as a city where Jews can live. This camp was created for the Red Cross to visit, and to fool the world, but the conditions inside were terrible.

She realized that the war was finally ending because the Germans were not around anymore. Her internment also ended but she cannot recall how it came to an end because she became very ill, which caused her to become unconscious. The Russians had been the ones to liberate her. Fortunately, her mother was still with her and she remembers being transported back to Hungary in wagons. She remembers the day she arrived to the location where their home used to be, but all that was left were deposits of corpses. They then went to her grandparents' home where she reunited with one of her uncles. In the end, the only family members she was able to reunite with were her uncle and one of her cousins.

It was very hard for Lilly Hecht to adjust. She tried very hard to forget about it. Mrs. Hecht married another survivor and they both tried to not speak about the subject almost until now. She moved to Mexico in 1947 and in 1980 she moved to the United States. She has three daughters but she rarely speaks on the subject of her experience during the Holocaust, and she has yet to make peace with what happened to her during that time in her life.

Assemblymember Lori Saldaña
District 76



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Rose Schindler

Interviewed by Rebecca Herrman

Rose Schindler

By Rebecca Herrman

A Story Not to Be Forgotten

Prior to 1938, Seredne, Czechoslovakia, occupied Russia in 1945, was a small but peaceful town with a *shtetl*-like feel almost like a modern *Fiddler on the Roof*. With only 2,000 residents it was one of those places where everyone knew each other. Jews and non-Jews alike lived side-by-side working and surviving to support their families. The Jews of Seredne were quite successful and owned most of the businesses while many of the non-Jews worked for them. The main street of Seredne was the center of town where shopkeepers both lived and ran their business.

Rose was born into Seredne life on December 28, 1929. “Roisie” as they called her in Yiddish, grew up in an Orthodox environment with traditional codes of conduct and lifestyle and weekly Shabbat services. You were an “outcast” if you didn’t follow the same customs as the rest of the community. Rose had seven brothers and sisters. Two older sisters named Helen and Judy, an older brother Philip who was called “Fishie,” three younger sisters named Bluma, Fay and Leah and a younger brother named Meier Bair. Rose was right in the middle.

Rose’s family lived on the main street where her father, Solomon Schwartz owned a tailor shop. “He was such a good tailor,” Rose remembered. They made their own clothes and even grew their own produce. They squeezed ten people, including Rose’s mother, Regina, Rose’s father and her seven siblings, and quite often guests, in their small home with no electricity or running water.

Rose went to school as it was mandatory until the age of fourteen, and had several friends both Jews and non-Jews. Jewish children usually did not attend high school unless parents were able to afford an education outside of the town. Most of the boys would attend Hebrew School after public school. Going to synagogue was a weekly event for the Jews in Seredne and Rose remembers enjoying dressing up for Shabbat and strolling down the dirt roads on the way to Temple showing off her new outfits. When Rose was not in school or at services, she was helping her mother in the home or visiting her grandmother who lived only three miles away.

When people weren’t working hard or going to synagogue, they would enjoy a movie in the town theatre or watch the traveling theatres when they passed through Seredne. Many of the town’s activities were arranged by the Jewish Town Council.

Until the age of fourteen, Rose remembers “living a beautiful life” and getting along with all of their neighbors. It was hard for Rose to reflect back on what little childhood she did have, though, since she was so young when it was taken away from her in 1938. When asked if she had had any aspirations during her younger years, Rose

responded: "What was there to dream?" Rose did not have the same luxury as other children her same age.

Life in Seredne was beautiful until one day everything changed.

In 1938, Hungary and Germany began their invasion of Czechoslovakia. That year was a turning point not just for Rose and her family, but for all Jews in Europe. Restrictions began to be placed on Jews limiting their whereabouts and way of life. Everything in Seredne was visibly changing from the way *goyim* (non-Jews) viewed Jews to rules on where or when Jews could be on a daily basis. Soon Jewish businesses were taken away, including Rose's father's, and were given to non-Jews. Luckily, he was able to take home one of the machines from the tailor shop and some limited materials in order to be able to survive on something. Many of the men, including Rose's father, were frequently taken to work outside of town as slave labor. "We made do with what we had," as did the majority of Jews, Rose commented. Everyone would help one another. "A Jew always finds a way" says the well-known Yiddish saying. Luckily, they had no problem with food because of the farm.

Not only were Jews stripped of their possessions, but also of their pride and dignity. They were humiliated and beaten to nothing. Rose even noticed how her non-Jewish friends and classmates changed their attitude toward her. They were taught to believe that Jews were "Christ-killers" and evil-doers. Jewish children were eventually excluded from public school. Curfew was in place in the forties and yellow stars were enforced.

Rose remembers one day during *Sukkot*, a Jewish holiday celebrating the Jewish people's survival of forty years in the Egyptian desert, when non-Jewish children were throwing rocks at them in the *Sukkah*, a temporary three-sided booth or hut roofed with branches. It was difficult to not respond, but they just let it happen. Jews had to be careful, always on the alert. They learned to ignore the dehumanizing and crude comments. When you saw violent kids, you would cross the street.

The general community did not know much about what was happening in Europe at the time due to the ban on radios. They had a basic sense of Nazism and who Hitler was, though, at least enough to know that Europe was heading down a dangerous path. One family did manage to keep a radio, only listening to it at night for safety. They discovered the atrocities- Polish Jews being killed, having to dig their own graves. Seredne Jews had little to worry though- G-d would protect them. They just prayed every day. They never thought that anything like what was happening in Poland would ever happen to them. After 1938, however, the feeling of G-d's protection was waning and many escaped into the forests. Czechoslovakia was under Hungarian rule until 1944. Hungarian Jews were the last to be deported to the concentration camps, a lucky break which helped Rose and others survive.

It was the morning of April 1944, one day after Passover. Rose was fourteen years old. A drum beat called the townspeople together in the community square to announce

that the Jews would be transported. "Take what you can bring," they were told. They rushed backed to their home to pack, unsure of why or where they were going. Rose's mother told her to wear three dresses and several pairs of socks because they "didn't know when we'll return."

After a couple of days, all the Jews of the district were transported by oxen-driven wagons to the city of Uzhgorod, Hungary where they were dumped along some train tracks near a brick factory. They were forced to build their own shelter and survive on the food they luckily brought with them. Soldiers with guns and dogs guarded them like prisoners day and night for about three to four weeks.

After Uzhgorod, they were rounded up into cattle cars like sardines to be shipped off to Auschwitz. The journey was only a couple of days, but it seemed like a lifetime. There was no room to move, no seats, no bathrooms, no water. The stench was abominable and people were passing out. The scene was "very sad," Rose reflected. No one knew what was going to happen to them. Rose had never before left her little town of Seredne so the experience was almost like a "horrible adventure."

When they arrived at their destination, they were hurried off of the cattle cars and told, once again, to "take what you can." The rest of their possessions were confiscated by the SS officers. A Jewish man in a uniform who worked in the camp came on the train and helped Rose with her things. He asked her how old she was. "I am fourteen," said Rose. The man told her to "tell them you are eighteen" so you will have a chance to survive. They were then ordered to line up. They experienced their first of what would be numerous role calls and selections. Rose took in her surroundings and spotted a big sign above an ominous set of open black gates that said "Auschwitz." Rose had no sense of where this was or what it meant. "I was in a daze."

Everyone stood silently as the SS walked up and down the lines of terrified and confused people. An SS officer in uniform approached Rose and asked her for her age. As instructed, she said she was eighteen. The man motioned for her to go to the "right," a lucky move. Her father and brother Fishi, who was seventeen years old at the time, were sent in another direction to be taken to a work camp. Her mother, younger brother and younger sisters, who were all under the age of twelve, were sent straight to the gas chambers. Children were useless to the Nazis, because they could not work. This would have been Rose's fate had she not lied about her age.

Helen at twenty-one, Judy at nineteen and Rose were left to support one another. They, along with the rest of the able-bodied women were immediately taken to a bathroom to be stripped and shaved. To add to their humiliation and degradation, the SS officers took pictures of them while they undressed. They took away all of their belongings and were given rags to dress in. Rose's dress was too long so she cut the bottom half and tied it around her head for warmth.

The sun began to go down and the women were told to line up for *tzelapel*- "roll call." They were counted several times per day, every day. While they were waiting they

could see fires behind an old building and if they listened carefully, heard people screaming and calling names. It was almost as if their “shadows were running,” Rose observed. Judy asked the SS officer what was happening and he responded that they were burning hair. “Hair does not make that noise,” Judy said. The officer then replied, “they are burning cripples.” Everyone tried covering their ears from the piercing screams and their noses from the putrid smell. At that point, Rose knew the fate of her mother and siblings.

Auschwitz was also the name of the city and was divided into several categories of *lagars*, German for “camp,” by electrical wire. The first camp was originally built for political prisoners and the second camp was called Birkenau where Rose was taken. There was a Czech camp and a gypsy camp nearby as well. There were thirty barracks that housed 1,000 women in Birkenau, each containing three rows of bunk beds where groups of eight women were forced to squeeze into one. There were no mattresses or blankets. For warmth, they huddled close together. Non-functioning fireplaces were in each barrack. Today, only the chimneys stand.

The following morning they were served black coffee. Rose, the curious child that she was, told her sisters that she was going to explore outside. As she looked around the depressing and eerie camp she heard a man call her name. Rose saw someone with a striped uniform approach her. She hesitated since she did not recognize him at first. It turned out to be her father. She didn’t have the heart to tell him what happened to her mother, but in his eyes, she could tell that he already knew. Rose told him that Helen and Judy were with her while her father said that Fishi was still with him. It was difficult to exchange any words, but the one thing that Rose’s father stressed was to “continue to stay together and to try and stay alive so you can tell the world what is happening to us.” You must “tell your story” to the world, he said. Father, Fishi and the three sisters met the following day, but on the third meeting, Rose’s father and Fishi did not show. That was the last time Rose saw her father and brother.

Weeks went by and the women grew weaker and sicker. People continued to be gassed without mercy. They were never given enough gas so they were half alive when they were being burned.

The food was atrocious. In the morning, there was black coffee. For lunch, they were given one slice of hard bread with a tiny bit of margarine. For dinner, they ate soup that was, as Rose clearly remembers, “so bad.” It was served in a large pot that eight people had to share from. There was cabbage and sometimes, if you were the lucky one to finish the last of the soup, potatoes. They must not have washed the vegetables, because the soup was always filled with sand. Chemicals were even put into the soup in order for women to not menstruate. Several times Rose would check the back of the kitchen for scraps hoping to find bits of leftover treasure.

Strong, Jewish women called *kapo* were put in charge of the camp. They kept the women in order. Once, Rose opened her mouth to complain about the food and got beaten. She still has the bruises and scratches to remind her. Many Jews were given job

posts in the camps to do the dirty work of the Nazis. If they refused, they were killed on the spot. Some had to watch their families go to their deaths and could do nothing about it.

Rose ended up getting sick with diarrhea for weeks. During this time, she was never chosen to work, but would always get selected to go to the “gas” line. She was brave and always managed to sneak out and join her sisters in the “safe” line. “You had to be clever,” Rose remarked. Once, however, she was almost caught trying to sneak into the transport line where her sisters were. She ran into one of the *kapo* where she was forced to make up a story to save herself. Luckily, she ended up sneaking into the “safe” line, once again. She barely made the 300 women cut off point. “Using your brain” to survive was crucial.

After about three to four months in Birkenau, the camp grew smaller every day as women passed away from sickness and starvation or even killed themselves on the electrical wire. The stench of burning and decaying bodies was repulsive. Thoughts of escaping alive were impossible as officers and dogs surrounded the camps, checking if everything was in order around the clock. Those who struggled to stay alive found themselves used to their own stench and lice since they could not wash themselves for months. It was “not a nice picture,” Rose described.

It was not easy for the women to stay alive and keep hoping. Giving up seemed like the easiest thing to do. But “the rumors made us survive.” Good rumors were important. Women would gather in the bathroom to hear the latest gossip if the Americans or the Russians would liberate them. Without the hope that everything would be okay and that one day they would reunite with family, Rose and her sisters would not have survived. Even with such hope it was hard to continue believing in something. “We all questioned our faith in G-d.” After the war, many didn’t even think about Judaism.

One day, things dramatically changed. The remaining women were cleaned up and given new clothes with numbered sheets of paper tacked onto them. They were packed onto trains destined for Brünental, a production camp for ammunition, uniforms and gas masks. It was a dream-come-true when they arrived. They were each given a bunk, a blanket, a canteen for food and a spoon. They were treated “500%” better than at Auschwitz-Birkenau, almost like humans since their labor was needed. The work was difficult and Rose joked once that she should be getting extra food for the work she was doing. Sure enough, she got it! They knew they were still “slaves” though, and were each branded with a number from the sheets of paper. Rose was known as “A25893.” The evidence is still on her arm.

On May 6, rumors spread that the Germans were going to be taking them on a march. However, the women woke up on the morning of May 8, 1945 not expecting it to be one of the most important days of their lives. The gate to the camp was open. They could hear planes and gun fire. They knew the war was coming to an end and that liberation was finally here. Rose saw Russian soldiers from afar and ran out waving a white cloth to surrender, not knowing if they were going to shoot her.

The women were given real food to eat. It was both a blessing and a curse. Many overindulged and got sick. Their bodies were not used to ingesting substantial food. Rose, among a few others were invited to go into town with some of the Russian soldiers. They were able to gather some extra pairs of clothes. They remained in the liberated camp between ten days and two weeks. Despite the freedom and relief they experienced, the women were still in constant danger of being raped by the soldiers.

It was finally time to go home. Rose at fifteen and her two sisters gathered the one pair of shoes and clothes they each had left and headed to the train station. It was a time filled with mixed feelings. Everyone felt liberated and thankful, like “free birds,” that the war finally ended, but, on the other hand, it was unpredictable and frightening. “You didn’t know what to do next.” There were so many questions to ask, not sure which ones could even be answered. *Who was still alive? Was there really a home to go back to? Was there anything left? Why did this happen to us? What happened to G-d?* No one was certain what the next step was after losing so much of their lives. One thing that Rose did know was that she certainly had “a new life to live.” Rose and her sisters never discussed what the plan was going to be or what the future held. The most important thing was to go home hoping that someone would be there. All you could do was plan for today and not worry about tomorrow.

The Schwartz girls arrived at the train station amidst chaos and hordes of people. It took them three days to get train tickets, which were free. Everything in Europe was chaotic without rules or regulations. Most things ended up being free at the time. When all joy and happiness was thought to be lost, Helen met a Czech soldier named Tibor and they immediately fell in love. He gave her a key to his apartment in Prague and promised her that they would get married one day.

After the war, people changed. Jews now had access to eateries and hostels, all for free during their journeys home. “Non-Jews opened their hearts” and took Jews into their homes. Before the war they would not have even lifted a finger. *What does it take for people to help their fellow human beings in the face of adversity and inhumanity?*

The train ride to Seredne took four weeks since there were no direct trains. They didn’t expect to come back to what they saw. Their once beautiful and cozy home was now a run-down horse shed. Despite the image, Rose was still hopeful that there was something still keeping the home alive. She went directly to a nook in the part of the house between the roof and corner wall. She held her breath and reached in to find the box of jewelry that her father had hidden before they were taken away to the concentration camps. Many Jews buried their prized possessions in the ground in hopes of not having every piece of their lives taken from them. Not everyone was able to uncover their buried treasures as Rose and her sisters did, leaving Europe’s soil rich with secret treasure forever.

It wasn’t easy to return to see their past in ruins. The girls went to their neighbors to “get their stuff back” since non-Jews took over the homes and businesses of the Jewish

people during the war. “You’d have to fight for it,” they said. Two dozen people returned to Seredne, many inhabiting abandoned homes like the Schwartz girls did.

Of those who returned, two different survivor friends were able to tell Rose what happened to her brother and father. Fishi and her father ended up getting separated. Her father remained in Birkenau while Fishi was transported to a camp where he made SS uniforms. A couple of days before the war ended, Fishi’s camp was cleared out. Everyone was taken to the forest where they were all shot. The Germans did not want any witnesses. One of Fishi’s friends had stayed back in the barracks because he was too sick to leave. He survived to tell the story of Fishi. Rose’s father got quite sick in the camp and was eventually sent to the gas chambers, because he could no longer work.

After seeing what was left of their home, Helen decided she would leave for Prague while Judy and Rose stayed in Seredne for about three to four weeks. Rose was still young and “wanted to have a good time” without worrying about the future. Judy also found love and married Bumi, a long time friend from Seredne and also a survivor. Five years later, they moved to Uzhgorod with their son.

In February 1946, Helen was lucky enough to sign Rose up for an Orphan Rehabilitation Program in England even though she had turned sixteen. Helen thought it a good idea for Rose to leave Czechoslovakia. The program ended up settling in Scotland in a hostel called Polton House, half an hour from Edinburgh. She was there for seven or eight months working and studying. The remaining thirty-five survivor children were shipped to Bedford, England where other survivors were waiting. They continued to work and go to school in the Goldingtonbury hostel. Rose soon became proficient in English. While there, she met Max Schindler, who became her husband of fifty-seven years. She “knew he was the one.”

Despite going their separate ways, the girls still kept in contact with one another. Rose even visited Helen in Prague in 1949.

The group of orphans continued to shrink as many went to Israel to fight in the War of Independence. After three to four months, the remaining children including Rose, Max and Max’s brother, Fred, were gathered up again and taken to London. The Committee for the Care of Children from the Concentration Camps (CCCCC) divided the children into pairs and placed them in families for at least a year. At this time, Max and Rose were engaged.

On July 27, 1950, Rose and Max were married in the West London Synagogue, the first of the survivors. Rose was twenty and Max was twenty-one. Sir Montefiore, a famous Italian-British man who saved several orphans after the war, walked Rose down the aisle.

The married couple lived in London for a year while Max corresponded with his family in America. Eventually, they were asked if they wanted to come to the States. “I thought money was on the streets!” Rose exclaimed. They did not hesitate, and were

sponsored a year later on October 12, 1951 to take a passenger ship to New York. When they arrived, they found a one bedroom apartment for rent and got jobs in the garment industry for \$1 an hour!

A year went by and the couple was proud of what they had accomplished. They saved up enough to rent their own place in Brooklyn. They furnished it beautifully and received guests all of the time to play cards. Many of their survivor friends had moved to New York as well. They had their first child, Roxanne, in 1954.

After five years, Max and Rose decided to try out California. Max had a friend already living there so he served as a useful contact. They moved to North Park, San Diego in April 1956 where they lived for six months until moving to their new home in southern San Diego. They had three more beautiful children within five years named Ben, Steve and Jeff and many years later were blessed with nine grandchildren.

Max worked for General Dynamics as a computer systems analyst for twenty-eight years while Rose worked part-time in a fabric store. In 1967, she opened up her own fabric store after the kids were all in school. After ten years, they closed the store. Max retired in 1988 and Rose in 1977.

Max and Rose have lived a good life together. "This country has been good to us, but we've been good to this country too," they responded. Grateful that America gave them such amazing opportunities, they also knew that they were great assets to the country. It wasn't easy overcoming the past, but, as Max pointed out, "most of the survivors went forward in their lives and didn't look back." This was an important process and many agencies such as the United Jewish Federation helped integrate people back in the community, placing survivors in different locations around the country.

In 1956, Max and Rose joined the *New Life Club*, a social organization for survivors, which was established in 1951. They were the youngest at the time. The club meets once a month over lunch and engages in unique programs. The club has a considerable membership of sixty to eighty people who give donations to help support efforts to keep the stories of the Holocaust alive from the Holocaust memorial in Israel, *Yad Vashem* to school field trips to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. The club even sponsors children to go on the March of the Living, a powerful guided walking trip through the remains of the concentration camps in Europe.

Helen settled in New York where she currently resides. She ended up never marrying Tibor. She came to the United States through papers Rose had sent in 1962. Unfortunately, Judy had been sick for a long time and passed away in 1961. She was buried in Prague. Along with her grave, a stone was erected dedicated to Rose's family who lost their lives. In 1968, Bumi's sister brought himself, his son and his new wife to the U.S.

In 1995, Rose and Max returned to Seredne on a Jewish Heritage Tour. The city was “100 years behind” with the same dirt roads, broken fences and roaming cows and chickens from Rose’s younger days. The Nazis had killed practically everything.

Looking back at how she lived her life with the memories of the past, Rose explained how difficult it was to return to Judaism as well as talk about the Holocaust and her experiences. Rose contemplated how she should “change my religion so my children don’t have to go through what I did.” For years, they did not go to Temple. But Rose soon realized that she was not strong enough to not do what she was brought up to do. When her children were born, she resumed Jewish practices and beliefs. “You need to hold on to something,” Rose highlighted. Rose often thinks about what it would have been like if they ended up in Israel where they would feel at home in their own country not having to worry about being judged for who they were.

One of the hardest things was to talk about the past. It wasn’t easy for survivors to revisit such painful times. The children knew that her and Max were survivors, that their parents had powerful experiences, but these stories were generally kept from them for most of their lives so that they could grow up a normal life without any stigma. It took Rose many years to finally talk about what happened. It wasn’t until her son Steve was in junior high school that she began talking. For the first time, she was ready to tell her story like her father had once told her to do. Today, at age seventy-eight, Rose has overcome much more than most can fathom, but has looked forward during the troubling times, continuing to live the good life that she has built for her family.

Each story that is told is unique and special on its own. But all tell of the unthinkable and the unimaginable; stories that “we have to keep talking about to make sure that it doesn’t happen again.” Each serves as a piece to a story in our history- A story that must never be forgotten.

Assemblymember Cameron Smyth
District 38



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Seldon & Eva Mars

Interviewed by Sarah Yuwiler, Careese
Quan, Sara Niemietz, Neev Zaiet,
Tina Zhu, Sean Oh, & Eric Chu

Acknowledgements

Bill Bolde, Principal, Saugus High School

KHHS AM-1220

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Seldon and Eva Mars

The following biographical information was obtained from an interview conducted with Seldon and Eva Mars, a man and wife residing in Newhall, California, located in the Santa Clarita Valley. The Santa Clarita Valley is part of the 38th Assembly District, represented by Assemblyman Cameron M. Smyth. The interview was conducted on Tuesday, February 19, 2008, in the library at Saugus High School in Saugus, California, from 6:00pm – 8:00pm. The interview was conducted by the following students from three area high schools: Sarah Yuwiler, Careese Quan and Sara Niemietz (Saugus High School) / Neev Zaiet (Valencia High School) / Tina Zhu, Sean Oh and Eric Chu (North Hollywood High School). Also in attendance was Bill Bolde, Principal, Saugus High School, who generously donated the use of his school library, as well as parents of the students, and a recording engineer from local radio station, KHTS AM-1220, who recorded the interview session. Diana Sevanian, local columnist for Santa Clarita newspaper, The Signal, and instrumental in this year's search to locate Seldon and Eva Mars, was present to record the session for print media. Mr. and Mrs. Mars were accompanied to the interview by their children and their spouses, as well as several of their grandchildren. Because Seldon and Eva were both very young and not married to one another during the Holocaust, each has a separate and distinct experience of that time in history. In an effort to provide the proper respect to each of their individual experiences, the recollections will be preceded by the first name of the person providing the recollection.

Seldon: My family life...I was born in a very small village and we lived very simple. We didn't have any radio, we didn't have any television, there was at that time no television at all, and we had no water in the house...we had outside in the ground. We took water from the ground and we lived a simple life. We didn't know anything what's going on in the world...no newspaper, nothing. I was born in Czechoslovakia...that's the place near the Polish border it calls Ukraine. It used to be Czechoslovakia and then the Hungarians came in and then the Ukrainians came in and they split the Czechoslovakia and Ukraine, so everybody got three portions.

Eva: I was born in Berlin, Germany and we had a very good life. My father worked for the Jewish Community and he was officer in there. My mother didn't work, and we had a live in maid that took care of us and we had a very good life. We were in Germany when Hitler came and I was eight years old. And then there was the Kristallnacht, (Night of the Broken Glass) I think you've heard about it where they burned all the synagogues and they burned all the Jewish stores and they threw all the...for instance clocks and things they had out the window and when that came, my mother decided the only place where you could still go was to Shanghai. We went to Shanghai in 1939. We went through a few years with Hitler when I was eight until I was thirteen...that was a very bad time. I have one sister...she survived, she is also here in America...she is five years older than I am. My father was born in...I don't know how you say it...it's Ober-Schlesien, it's called Beuthen in German and my mother was born in Berlin, but my

grandfather came from Lithuania. He was a cantor...I don't know how you say it...in German we say Oba Cantor, that's the highest of the cantors in the synagogue...and he was born in by Vilna, not far. We had the synagogue right around the corner and of course, my parents didn't drive, we didn't have cars...but it was very close, everybody observed everything.

Seldon: The Jewish life was very simple. It was in a village, you know...we attended the synagogue, you know, I went to the Czech school and I went to the Jewish school. We were busy studying. So, my parents wanted us to be educated so we can make a good living. So I had day and night, day and night school, to learn. It was Hebrew school...it was boys and girls separate...yeah, because they're religious, you know.

Eva: We were not such a big family but we always had families and friends...our house was constantly with people. My father's hobby was music and he had a choir and there was always music and you know, lively. Yes, there was fun...but that was before 1933. There was nothing strange between any of us...nothing. I had friends when I was little and they used to play with us and we used to go to them and they came to us. We didn't know about Hitler. We didn't even know the difference before the war. I just knew that there were Jewish people and non-Jewish people but it didn't make any difference. My full name is Eva Epstein... (Eva looks over at Sheldon as Sheldon chuckles at the question regarding his name)

Seldon: I changed my name when I came here because they told me that it was a lot of anti-Semite of Jews here, so my Aunt says you better change your name. So she went and changed it...my first name was Z-E-L-I-G, and the last name was M-A-R-C-H-O-V-I-C...Marchovic. And she made it to Seldon Mars...MARS... like the candy (laughs).

Eva: The Nazis affected our life...yes, very much because when we...when the they were...when the SS was marching, we had to stand by the sidewalk and put our right hand up to hail Hitler and when I walked with my mother, when we went shopping or something and we heard the music that they were marching my mother used to say "Let's go find a store or something", and run in because we didn't want to stand there and put our hands up, so we always went into a store or something. For a child eight years old it was like you had to hide...what I have now and I still go to the psychiatrist, I still have that little girl here. (points to her head) And I cannot go in deserts because there are no houses to run to...and I cannot go to mountains because I don't know what's behind it, and I am still suffering. My husband was forced to wear the yellow Star of David but not where I was.

Seldon: I was in Auschwitz...yeah, first in Auschwitz...only long time was two weeks in Auschwitz then we went to another camp...it's called Brick...and what we did there is make tracks for the trains. And then we went to another camp called Reichenbach and we were working in a factory making munitions. I don't know what I made but I made some kind of stuff. I worked there which wasn't bad and what they gave you every Friday, they gave you a pack of cigarettes. I sold my pack of cigarettes for bread because you know I got a piece of bread in the morning and I was thinking what shall I do if I

don't eat it in the morning, someone will steal it from me so I better eat it...was a piece of bread and was very heavy so I was glad to have that and I ate it...so I sold my cigarettes for bread.

Eva: My father did not lose his job...my father was self-employed. Yes, we could go to school even after the Nazis came in. That was another thing...because across the street was a non-Jewish school and I went to an all girls Jewish school and we were afraid to go to school because the boys used to come and be mean to us and things. Well, it's different over there with property, I don't know how to explain it...you have a big building you have one whole side...it's like a house... I don't know how to explain it... anyway, we had to leave everything, and the jewelry we had we had to bring to...(pauses) you have to excuse me, when I get nervous I keep forgetting words...a pawnshop...it comes back to me...I'm not all bad. (laughs) And we had to bring all our jewelry, my parents and everybody had to bring all the jewelry to a pawnshop and just leave it.

Seldon: And I accumulated all the jewelry from my two sisters and ours and I made a hole with a big metal iron stake in the ground very deep and I dropped them in the ground and covered it up so you know nobody will notice it. When I came back from the concentration camp I was so weak...number one I didn't have a shovel and even if I would have a shovel I couldn't even use a shovel because I was so skinny and so weak. I think the jewelry is still there. (laughs) I never went back.

Eva: Well, we had no choice first of all when it came to leaving our home. We wanted to get out...we were not forced out but we didn't want to stay because if we stayed, first of all they would have taken my father in the concentration camp and we would have to go too. So my mother was smart and she went ...and you could just go to the uh, you know, (pauses) I'm sorry, I lose words...I can't help it. My mother just went and bought tickets to Shanghai because you didn't need a visa for there and we went right to Shanghai in 1939 and that was also a bad memory because we had to leave when it was still dark and had to go by the wall so you know, nobody will see us to the station and travel to Italy. And then we were 27 days on a ship going to Shanghai. And we came there, we didn't know where we were, or where we were going to go, or what was going to be, but we just knew we didn't have Hitler there and so when we came there they took us all on a big truck...open truck like animals and drove us to the camps. It was occupied by Japanese and was all bombed out by the Chinese and we had to stay in the ghetto with camps because the Japanese were working with the Germans together.

Seldon: It was hard because first we were in a ghetto and while we were in the ghetto they took all the young boys for work. And all we did we went to the Jewish houses and took out all the belongings and loaded up in a pickup...a big pickup and I don't know where they took it and that is while we were in the ghetto...we did work that way and then finally they took us to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was a very bad camp...a lot of people were killed there. There was a crematorium and they burned a lot of people there...yeah...because when my whole family came in there was a Gestapo, white gloves, SS, he was standing and he said, "You go there, you go there", you know separate

us. When he separated us I didn't even have time to say goodbye to my parents because I didn't know where I was going and what's going to be next. So we all went, the older people went in the crematorium right away and the younger people they separated the girls and the boys to go to work...and you had to completely undress and everything, and they shaved you and everything and you got new clothes. The clothes were like for, uh, you know with stripes and the boys after they cut your hair then they took a fine electric machine and made a stripe here so you know you cannot run away because you're...you are marked ...so you couldn't do nothing. And no matter what, you can't do nothing because we are quite like in a camp with wire around and wire that you can't even get out and couldn't run away. And you were watched by big booths and there was an SS standing and he could look all around if anybody is going to run away. When we went to work, we had to go by groups...we went to work certain places and two SS men they used to count us every morning before and give to the command how many we are, and then we went out and they were with us, you know, like this. We walked to work, then we came back, they count us again to make sure nobody misses and give the report that everybody came back. I was twenty-one when I was at Auschwitz. Our transport to Auschwitz was they took us to the train and we were in like, you know, it's a closed car like they transfer animals, you know, its closed with only little windows on top...no toilet, nothing. And we were there 'til from the place where we entered there...it was about a day and a half and excuse me, we had to go the toilet that's just right there between all the people and pour it out the little window when we could...it wasn't a pleasure.

Eva: We found out we needed to leave our home when they started to burn the synagogues and so my mother said we're not going to stay here because afterwards they picked up all the men and brought them first to jail and then to the concentration camps. And my father was hiding out by an older lady, a widow, and she took in a few men you know just for a couple of weeks or so, and then my mother got the tickets and we could go to China. My first impression of the Shanghai camp...well, thank God I didn't have it as bad as my husband, because we could walk within the camp. I went into a room, they put the girls separate, the boys separate and the parents separate, so we were in a room with fifteen girls and it was all young girls like I was. We got along alright, and when you're a child you don't think everything is so serious, at least we were not threatened from Hitler. I mean we didn't know it's going to be bad over there too but when you're girls with all these children you blend in. And that's another thing...I cannot be alone now because I grew up with so many kids in the room and I still am afraid at night and I wouldn't stay alone. And I like people, I love people and I love to go out and be with people now because I cannot be alone. The name of the Shanghai camp was Chaoufoong. The living quarters were...I have a picture...which is not too good, because we didn't have good cameras or anything. We had bunk beds but the first one was out of wood and I'm embarrassed to say it but they had so many bedbugs and things in them...it was terrible.

Seldon: Going back to at home we had to wear a yellow Star of David every time when we went outside so that everybody recognize that we are Jews.

Eva: My whole family went to the Shanghai camp. I just have one sister and my parents and we all went. The food we had was beans and we had one bread, which was like this for four people. We had black beans and I'm sorry they had worms in it so we had to eat that...because you know. We had one hospital but they didn't have much medication and I was in there too because I had typhoid fever. That's another thing...I don't take my temperature because I'm afraid of temperature. When you have typhoid fever you have very high temperature. Things were not sanitary at all...I know you want to know this...I had stomach typhoid, I had worms that were so big they tried to give something to me to kill them and then they wanted to come out this way instead of the other way...it was terrible. And now I have only one working kidney because the doctor told me it comes from infection. We couldn't really bring personal belongings to the camp. We just had the clothes off our back. I mean whatever we wore...we couldn't buy anything new. In fact when we were packing they had someone watch us so we wouldn't buy anything new and we couldn't take too much along. My father took some music along because he had some sheet music and things from his choir so they didn't say anything. What did I do in the camp? Well, I was still a little girl but I was so much sick that I couldn't even go to...I mean they had a school, a Jewish school but I couldn't even go to that. When I got a little better I had to learn something and I wanted to learn dress making, so I started but I wasn't so good. I got sick while I was in the camp. The hospital was out of the camp, out of the ghetto, so I was afraid that my parents couldn't come visit me. If you wanted to leave the camp you had to go to a Japanese, I don't know what he was, he called himself the "King of the Jews", and you had to get a passport to go out. Yes, we had cultural things and activities...my father had a choir in the synagogue, in a Russian synagogue. There was a little bit but not too much...we had our own entertainment in the camps. My family did come visit me in the hospital that was just before they closed the ghetto.

Seldon: Most of my family was killed...sisters, my mother and father, the kids they took us from the ghetto and right away they all were killed, I couldn't even say goodbye, nothing... I didn't see them anymore.

Eva: We didn't hear anything about things going on in Europe because we didn't have any contact. Acts of kindness? Yes, there was one German man and he was living next to us and he was in the police station and after a while my father saw him and he said to him, after my father was already hiding with the lady, and he says, "You don't have to worry, I took your name out of the files, you're not here". So we tried after we left Germany but we couldn't be in contact with him anymore and I don't know what happened to him.

Seldon: Acts of kindness? The people who lived in the village didn't do any harm to us because what happened is it changed all the time different like Hungarian, Czech and so on, so they were afraid that if it keep changing that they would take advantage of them so they didn't harm...the neighbors didn't harm us.

Eva: In Germany we didn't have to hide but we were afraid to go out. I remember when I was little and when they first came and we walked in the street. We had a very, very

religious family living in our building and he went into the street and there came these SS people and they took his beard and they pulled his beard and they took some iron and they made a hole in his head and he was bleeding and it was terrible what you saw, you know. Nobody we knew even dared get involved in resistance. I was in Shanghai over eight years. When we first came they took us to the camp, and then a year we were out of the camp in the ghetto, and then we were back in the camp.

Seldon: I was in the camps for a total of a year. We were in Auschwitz for only a short time and from there we went to other camps working certain things. I was 22 when I was liberated from the camps. Russians liberated our camp. You see, when I was liberated from the concentration camp I was so skinny, you know, I hardly could walk so a German woman, a young woman, came and took me home and fed me slowly and gave me to eat, so I could eat something that my stomach could take. One day a Russian soldier came to the door and he was going to rape her, so I answered the door to the Russian and he went away...I spoke a little Russian and I said "I live here and nobody else", so I protected her.

Eva: We knew the war was ending because the American soldiers came in and we knew right away. And this Japanese man that was calling himself the "King of the Jews" he ran away because he was so scared, and the Navy came and they came to the camps first.

Seldon: We had no choice but to survive, because you know, as much as I could do, I did, because I was brought up strong, and a lot of people couldn't survive, but I was still young, so I survived. One time, you know I was digging ditches and I was already weak and they threw me into the ditch. I have a friend of mine, he's passed away now, but he recognized me after the war and he says, "Remember I took you out from the ditch so you can still be alive". In Burbank, there's Griffith Park and we met there and he saw me and he says, "Remember I took you out of the ditch". I didn't make friends in the camp, but I have other close friends...they're all over the world, I don't see any here. I went five times in Israel and I met a couple of friends that I was in the camps and so on and we were very happy and we got together and so on. Did I have time to myself? No...the only time you had was on Sunday you didn't work and all you did was looking at your clothes to see lice so you could kill them. (laughs)

Eva: I think the main thing you should know that it's true what we tell you, because there are people that say it never happened and I don't want you to think that, because it's very important that the youth nowadays knows it and will never forget that it really happened. Because God forbid I don't wish anybody to go through anything like this.

Seldon: I had it out of my mind, I don't like to think about it...at nights like tonight maybe, I wouldn't be able to sleep, because I had to go through what I've been through and I can't sleep. At night I pretty much dream...I kick she says...

Eva: Yeah, he gets very bad nightmares, he screams, he kicks me and hits me and I try to hold him away and then he thinks it's really somebody and he's getting even worse so it's really hard you know we don't have a good night's sleep.

Seldon: When we transferred camps they never ask you or tell you nothing, they say you go here and that's it...we had no voice. Altogether I was in camps for one year. I was in a ghetto for five months before camps.

Eva: Right after the war it was so happy I don't know how to say it...like a rock is off your chest...you know that now you can get out, you know from this place...

Seldon: After the war, after the ghetto, I went out and I took a train to go home and on the train I got sick. I got typhus and they dropped me off in a place in Slovakia, in a hospital. I was there 'til I got a little better and I see people bringing food for the other patients and I was so hungry to have something to eat because I get very little food. So one nurse says you are ready, you can walk a little bit, so she says to me, "I'm going to give you the clothes but don't tell nobody that you got the clothes. Dress yourself and walk out of the hospital and go toward the right and go the Czech's counsel and he'll give you twenty-five dollars and buy yourself what you want...walk in and don't ask questions". I bought myself a lot of food and I was so happy to eat.

Eva: I came to America in 1947. We came to America because we tried every place we could, my mother had a cousin here and so she wrote to them. We were supposed to go to Australia too, but my parents and my sister and my father was supposed to get a pension but it wasn't enough money to go live in Australia, and my mother found her cousin here, and she wrote to her and they sent us enough to come.

Seldon: I actually wanted to go to Palestine. So what happened is, I got documents that I was born in Greece, and a few guys walked into Greece and showed the documents that we are from Greece but we didn't speak Greek, so they said, "Get back, we don't need you, you're not Greeks". (laughs) So we went to Italy but Italy accepted us, so we were in Italy until we came to America.

Question: How did you meet each other? (Eva and Seldon both laugh)

Seldon: By accident! (They both laugh again) It was!

Eva: I went to a dance after the war when we came here with the Shanghai people and we had a dance, and upstairs there was a singles dance. I went with my parents and sister to the dance and my husband (Seldon) went upstairs to the other dance and then he came down and he asked me to dance. So I danced with him and he said he wanted to go out with me. I didn't know him and I never lie but this time I did, so I said, "I'm going on vacation so if you want to go out with me call me in two weeks". So I figured if he really wants to go out with me he's going to call me and if he doesn't then he throws it away. (laughs)

Seldon: So I went and I had two phones the same number...they said Normandy...used to be the number N, O. I had a girlfriend, Ruth, so I was going to call Ruth and here I dialed her (Eva's) number and I said is that Ruth, and she said, "No, I'll give you my

sister” and I said no, no, no, I want to talk to you. And guess what...I made a date with her, we went to a dance and who shows up? Ruth shows up! (laughs) So I said to her (Eva) let’s go out of here, I don’t want to be here, I want to go...I lost Ruth! (laughs) The world is so small!

Eva: I was not able to reunite with any of my other family members. I had one cousin she lived in New York, and I hadn’t seen her and she passed away. I think I had another cousin in England and I’ve never seen her, and the rest of my family, my aunt, uncle and my cousin went to Holland when Hitler came in 1933. They went to Amsterdam and they established a business and everything, and when Hitler came to Amsterdam he took all the people, all the Jewish people and put them in the concentration camp and they were all killed. So I don’t have any family left and my cousin and my aunts from my father’s side were also all killed.

Seldon: And I have a big family...I had...I haven’t now. Rich everything, but they didn’t help me a bit...nothing. I had to go live with a family from Poland and I paid ten dollars a week room and board.

Eva: I think I adjusted good to the end of the Holocaust but I have so many leftovers you know...so does my husband, and its hard...I have to live with that for the rest of my life. I mean I’m forcing myself...I tell you the truth, I forced myself to come here tonight but I had to do it, because I get panic attacks and I never know when they come and that’s something that has to help me. Something has to trigger it and I don’t know what that is because that’s the little girl up there. (points to her head)

Seldon: How did the Nazis treat us as prisoners? The Nazis and the prisoners, if I was in the camp I had nothing to do but with the Guard that took us from the factory to work and he didn’t bother us, as long as we didn’t run away. He didn’t bother us, he hold us like this you know, the group, but he didn’t bother us. Actually in the factory there was a German guard and he says to me, “Over there in that locker I brought you some food...you can go in and get yourself some”. And sometimes I jumped over from the factory and I went into a yard, a private yard to pick food at night, fruits and so on. We took chances a lot...we could’ve been shot and so on but you had to take chances to steal and so on. There was one guy who ran away and they brought him back in the factory...he was already shot, he was bleeding outside on the sidewalk by the factory and they all called us out and they showed us... “You see what happens if you run away? You’re all going to sit here like this bleeding to death”.

Seldon: I was reunited with my younger sister after the war. I only had my younger sister...one sister was here in America and the younger sister I met between people who were liberated and people find each other in big cities like Budapest or Prague or big cities. And they say, “Okay, I saw your sister in Budapest”, and I went to Budapest and looked up and I found her there...the younger sister....from mouth to mouth, really.

Eva: Yeah, she’s still alive. My family was all there in the camp...my parents were in a different building and my sister and I were in a different building, but we saw each other.

After the war when we came here I really didn't have a profession and so I had to go to...well now they call it a sweatshop. I was in a factory and I only knew how to sew by hand because I couldn't sew on a machine. A girl in Europe does not...they go only studying, they don't really work you know, so I didn't know. All I knew was to sew by hand, and I wasn't very fast, so I had to always take a job together with my sister because she was older and she knew already more, and to keep my job I had to borrow some tickets. They gave you tickets for each piece that you made...piece work...and I had to borrow tickets from my sister and pay her back because otherwise I wouldn't have a job.

Eva: I have three children, two are here, the one and the other one in the middle is my granddaughter and this is my other granddaughter, my son in law, my grandson and his wife...that's my family and I have more! We had to build a new family by ourselves because we had nobody left from Germany. I treat them all alike but I have eleven...I have some borrowed ones too...my grandson got married and his wife is my granddaughter just like my other ones. (laughs) My children and grandchildren never really heard our stories until we made the video for Steven Spielberg (Shoah Foundation) and there at the end of it you can bring anybody you want to so we brought our family, and they said they didn't really know anything because we never talked about it. At first we thought it was going to be too hard for them to get all this, but now I think everybody should know it so we started talking now...but it's hard. To make peace with all that happened you have to force yourself. If you don't have anything leftover like I have, so many things that are not pleasant to live with, then I think you can be easier and forget faster but these are all memories when I panic. Because when you panic you think you are dying and that's it, and it goes through your whole body and I have problems...I can't help it but I fight it. You see I came here and I'm talking to you...and now I feel good, you know...after I finish with things that I force myself to do, I feel good now that I did it.

Seldon: My birthday is October 25, 1922.

Eva: My birthday is August 1, 1925.

Seldon: When I stayed with the German lady who helped me after my liberation, I found things behind an armoire one day. You see a lot of Germans after Hitler took over, they moved out the Jews, and a lot of them went into Jewish places and took things. So that German woman who took me in, there was a book that fell down and I looked behind an armoire where it fell down and there was a door there and I moved the armoire and looked in behind the door and there were so many things there...expensive things that belonged to Jews. And I packed myself a big bag and got up and left at night and went away on the train. I got sick on the train and somebody got my stuff, I don't know who. And I wind up in the hospital with pneumonia, so I lost it...I stole it and they stole it from me. (laughs)

Eva: No I cannot forgive the Nazis for what they did...not forgive. I mean, I love everybody because that's my nature. I cannot be mad at anyone but this is too much...this is too much. How can people be so mean? I mean, this is unbelievable. But

the Germans now, you know, they were not born yet, so you cannot be mad at them...unless it starts again. Because Germany has a lot of anti-Semitism now and so does here...in the Valley someplace in the Jewish Center was on the news...terrible, terrible. It's scared that I shouldn't come here, that's why we come and we have to talk about it, because it's not only for Jewish people. There were in Germany, of course, Jewish people first. Then came Gypsies...we had some Gypsies living there and if you were unable to work or were disabled they were killed and also people that were...homosexual...they also went to the camps. So its not only Jewish people, so you have to have that in your mind if you're not Jewish...it can happen to anybody, not only to one person or one kind of person.

Seldon: Well, I can say I worked myself up very nice...I didn't need any help from nobody. I came United States and applied for mailman and I got a job and finally made a civil service test. It took me a long time it was kind of tricky, and I was a mailman. And from mailman I got hired to carry mail and I became maintenance manager. I was very handy so I was maintenance manager and I retired as superintendent engineer in maintenance and I get a nice pension now from the post office.

Eva: The message I would like to tell people is don't ever hate anybody and don't point out, "You're this or you're that"...people are all alike no matter what color, no matter what race, or what religion and everybody should get along. The main thing is no hate...no fighting...I don't know how to explain it...I cannot hate anybody even what I went through...

Seldon: I agree with that, yeah...

Eva: Everybody is the same...it doesn't matter to me...

Assemblymember Sandré Swanson
District 16



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Raya Gabrina

*Interviewed by Karla Coleman &
Kriti Khari & Preetibala Kaur*

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Sacrifice By Fire

It has been sixty three painful years since the demise of the Nazi Regime and the catastrophic deaths of nearly six million Jews in the Holocaust. Holocaust, which literally translated means “sacrificed by fire,” is the name given to the Nazi Party’s attempt led by Adolf Hitler to not merely sacrifice, but exterminate the Jewish race, from 1933 through 1945. Although the Holocaust is known world-wide, not many people have the opportunity to hear about it first hand from a survivor. The following is the story of Raya Gabrina, whose immense sufferings began when she was merely nine years old and continues to this day.

Before the years of gas chambers and concentration camps, the Nazis put their ideas into effect by destroying and terrorizing the lives of Jews throughout Europe in a process called cleansing. Among the frightened people and turmoil in Holland, one shy little girl by the name of Raya Gabrina led a normal Jewish life in a happy family. Born in 1928, Raya Gabrina entered a world controlled by the Nazis which oppressed her family and her religion. She grew up in a small town called Zamosc with a happy family of three brothers and four sisters. Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke of her four brothers, Sruel, Kyle, David and Mnendo and her three sister, Hannah, Clara, and Rosa with Raya being the youngest of the family. She intimates in recalling her father, the business man, and her mother who baked bread every Thursday and allowed Raya to make a twisted bread which would grow over night. Although the Jewish people felt oppression, the family was still able to observe customs and attend Temple on Saturdays. On these honored days, the family dressed up and Raya had the special privilege of carrying the Talmud, or the Jewish holy text to the services. Saturday night was reserved as a social time, during which her home was filled with family and neighbors who enjoyed her mother’s delicious and carefully made breads and cakes. Yet the more the Nazis took control, the more the oppression and tension rose in her hometown. Jews were not allowed to pursue higher education and sometimes her brothers would come home relating stories of boys who wanted to fight them and who called them “dirty Jews” on the street. The happy days of friends, soccer on the streets and playgrounds was drawing to an end.

On the day the Germans declared war, Raya, along with other young children of the neighborhood, sat on the steps of the candy store. Across the street, she saw Colfin, an adored teacher who called to her and simply said, “Do you know there is a war,” before hugging her and telling her it might be a long time before they saw each other again. From that day, she noticed her friends began to disappear as they silently left the country in hopes of protection. Even as she cried to her father that her friends had left her, Raya had no idea how quickly and drastically her life was going to change. Her father, in hopes of protecting the two youngest children of the family, sent her and her

brother to the Poland-Russian border. They were transported in vehicles usually used to transport cattle, with branches covering them in case of Nazi bombing. There, they found a temple as shelter along with other refugees. Their lives took a rapid and dramatic turn as they too became refugees in a foreign land. They often had no food, and sometimes they would have to wait in lines all night in hopes of receiving even a small ration. It rained, it was cold, and the children cried in the temple added to their grief as they stood in line for food for countless hours only to find that there was no more.

When Raya's family returned to their home in Holland, where they had left all their possessions, they found it barren. All their valuables had been stolen. As Raya painfully recalled, the Germans had taken over, and that's how it started. The "cleansing" spread and along with it came panic and instability. One of her brothers went into hiding, but was found by the Nazis and taken away, never to be seen again. Germans came to her town and arrested Jews, making them march in the most crowded traffic areas ordering "March shnel" which means walk fast. Her father was taken and her family sent to Maidanek concentration camp. Once there, her family was separated once again, women one way, men the other, and children yet another. At ten years of age, Raya was never to see any member of her family again after that horrific day. As the years have passed she managed to get some information on her family. Sadly she has discovered that two of her sisters were killed in the gas chambers and two of her brothers were shot as alleged spies in front of their family.

All alone now, with only other crying and desolate children surrounding her, she had to face the horrors of the camp. Nazi reporters came to view them where they slept, but they were not allowed to speak or ask questions. The children simply had to obey without question. Luckily, in the camp Raya met a Polish officer who she had known prior to being sent to the camp. He took her to a Polish peasant family who hid her from the Nazis. For the first time since the camps, Raya had safety, food, shelter, and care. Sadly this did not last for long. Manya, the mother of the peasant family got word that a German boy had alerted the Nazis that she was hiding Jews. Manya simply said "Raya, I have to let you go."

Raya was all alone in a dangerous country. Shaking, and scared to death she hid in a nearby haystack. Manya had taken good care of her and was not proud of having let the girl go out into the world alone. She followed Raya to the haystack and whispered to her in Hebrew "I'm Jewish too, but nobody knows. You have to be on your own." Unfortunately being as young as Raya was, she was quickly captured by the Germans once again and sent to a more horrific place than she had been before.

Upon her arrival to a new concentration camp, she was sent to the clinic. In the clinic, the infamous doctors such as Doctor Josef Mengele, performed experiments on the children to "keep them healthy" as one told Raya. To this day, that is all she knows about the various injections which were given to her and which she had no choice but to endure. As Raya passed anxious days in the clinic, Manya got word that she was in such an institute. Manya had gone to the forest to join the freedom fighters who were fighting the Germans. She convinced some of her compatriots to go to the nearby clinic and

liberate the helpless victims. Raya recalled the success of the freedom fighters, as they destroyed the clinic and set the people free. Sadly, however many of the prisoners did not make it. After leaving the clinic, she was taken to the Russian border where the children were instructed to speak Russian only, and no other language. There was freedom there, but largely mixed with confusion. Many liberated prisoners were there. Raya, like many others was hoping to find a familiar face and dreaming of finding her family but to no avail. Although the heroic efforts led by Manya liberated Raya, they were never reunited and Raya never saw Manya again.

Eventually the young children were led to a *kiputz*, where they were educated. Along with getting an education the children had to work hard and were not allowed to leave. Raya, although being the youngest, was given the responsibility of helping the other children stop crying and let them know that life must go on. In so doing, she made a close friend by the name of Hayka or Helen. Helen introduced her to her brother who, Raya discovered, smuggled people across the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia. Two years after being introduced, Raya married him and became the nurse to aid his attempt to help others. She checked and vaccinated the children as they moved across borders. At the age of fifteen, Raya was married and performing a dangerous activity. She was young and naive, as she recalled, and remembers constantly crying, having her pillow always wet every night thinking about her family. She adapted as best she could to her new life and accepted the changes. As she did, she met people who she had encountered previously. She reunited with Bella, a young woman who had a baby when Raya had last seen her, but who had lost the child to typhus in the camps. She witnessed liberated people walking down the street like skeletons, swollen with hunger. In Vienna, she saw a wall where Jews wrote their names as they crossed borders, in the hopes that family members would see it and find them. In 1945, in a Russian occupied zone, she discovered that the war was over.

After the war, Raya traveled to Austria, Vietnam and eventually moved to Florida and lived there for thirty years before relocating to Alameda, California where her youngest child lives. She and her husband had three children; one daughter and two sons before her husband passed away in 1967. Her children are now 60, 57 and 51 and deal with her story, and their past in their own way. The eldest chooses not to hear about it. Both of her sons currently live in Israel. Raya has made peace with that, recognizing that one cannot force anyone else to listen to what one does not want to. Her youngest and only daughter has children, who like their mother, enjoy Raya's stories and ask her to retell them often.

It has been sixty three painful years since World War II ended and Raya is still attempting to accept all that occurred. She still deals with depression and still dreams that one day she will find her family, perhaps by some miracle, while walking the streets of Alameda. Raya Gabrina's story is a part of history, and acts as a powerful voice for a people who had previously had no say. The years do not erase such immense grief, pain, and suffering but perhaps by allowing others to see an individual's perspective, it will inspire the world to strive towards peace and equality. Perhaps in that way the look of pain in Raya's eyes can be lessened, so with time she can move on even though she could

never forget. Her story, her voice, and her strength is a great inspiration to the world, and has also made a lasting and powerful impact on my life.

By Kriti Khari and Preetibala Kaur

Sacrificed By Fire

There are many people living in this world. All suffer, although many don't admit it. Even earlier, people had a life full of hardships-many lived, many died, many suffered, many didn't, for many people life was harsh and for others it was a challenge. Holocaust, The World War II, was a big example of how people suffered. It was the highest level of organized hate and the worst genocide in history. Holocaust means "sacrifice by fire" as Jewish people were burned into crematories. It was an example of anti-Semitism by the Nazi party also known as The Third Reich headed by Hitler who was also referred as Fuehrer-leader. He considered Aryans as the master race.

During those days of Holocaust there were many people who suffered and one of them was Ms. Raya Gabrina who escaped this horrible cycle of death; she was born on May 25th, 1928, in a place called Zamosc in Holland. She was born in a happy and rich family. Her father was born in Poland and her mother was born in Russia. She had 3 elder sisters named Ghana, Clara, and Roza and had 4 elder brothers named Sruel, Keil, Mendel, and David. She grew up in Poland, in a big rural city, and lived most of her childhood there. She spoke Polish, German, Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew. Her father was a businessman, and her mom was a housewife. She was a shy but a pious little girl because she held a Tanakh in her hand when she walked to the synagogue with her father every Saturday.

One fine day, Raya was sitting at the footsteps of her house and pondered about where her friends were because her town seemed abandoned. Suddenly, she saw her favorite teacher Colfin calling Raya towards her. Her teacher whispered to her, "Do you know there is a war going on?" which made Raya cry. She ran home and asked her dad, "Where are all my friends, Daddy?" with tears trickling down her cheeks. This was the first time she had found out about the tragic events that were going on. Then all the people in her town, including her family, were taken to the synagogue where the Germans checked to see if any of them were carrying any valuables. Eventually, she and her family were taken to the Russian border along with other Jewish families by the Nazis in cattle cars.

When they reached the border, Raya's father gave her his coat and said "Raya, I'll be back. Don't move, stay here. I'll go get our stuff. " When he got to the cattle car, he found out that their luggage had been taken by the Nazis - even their food. There was bombardment going on all throughout the border, so the SS officers left the camp to hide and people dug out holes in which they could hide because they didn't want to get hit by the bombing and many tried to escape from the camp. The Jews had no freedom at all. Raya's brother had a daughter named Sonja and didn't want Raya and his daughter to be

taken by the Nazis, so he told Raya to take Sonja to the basement. Later, her brother and Raya with Sonja were found and taken away.

The Nazis arrested the Hassidic Jews and ordered “March Schnell” which literally meant walk fast. Her father and her siblings were taken, away which changed her life dramatically. As one can imagine how they would feel after they were separated from their family - not because they wanted it but because they were forced to. She was again taken to a new place. It was a concentration camp named Maidanek at Auschwitz where they were forced to wear the Star of David. The concentration camp was a place characterized by extremely harsh conditions in which they had to work. In the Maidanek concentration camp there was no way to escape and people who did try to escape would be electrocuted by high-voltage electricity through barbed wires.

As a young child, Raya had to go through tremendous changes. Her sisters were sent to gas chambers. Two of her brothers were killed in front of the other two because they were accused of being Jewish spies. She, from that day onwards, never saw any of her siblings or her parents. She was with other older women in the camp. Kapos, overseers in charge of work details and were selected from among the camp prisoners, usually from any criminal or otherwise violent element, would come in to keep a check on them every evening.

One of the Polish Nazis saw her and tried to help her out, as she was his sister’s friend. He hid her among the other Polish peasant families and many times she hid in the hay stacks. Later on, a child who was Polish told the Nazis that the man was hiding a Jew. The man got scared and so he told her to leave. She left without saying a word and was thankful that for some time she had safety. She set out without knowing where she was going.

Manya, a Polish lady, saw her alone wandering on the streets. Manya was talking in Hebrew, which Raya hardly understood. She said in whispers to Raya, “I am Jewish too, but no one knows. Now you have to be on your own.” As soon as the lady left the Nazis saw Raya and caught her. She was then taken to Dr. Mengele, who experimented on Jewish people. Still, Manya kept an eye on Raya and tried to do anything she could to save her. Manya joined the freedom fighters that were Polish and Jewish; they destroyed Dr. Mengele’s clinic. Later, Manya immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada and died in 2006.

Then they took Raya and several other people to the Russian border and told her “Only speak Polish and Russian”. Everyone on the border was confused and all were looking for their family members whom they hoped they could find as the Russians had freed many people after the war. Then they were taken to a German town Nidelshlezia. To save the children the adults were planning to send the children to Israel and Raya didn’t want to go there. Later, Raya saw a man from the Red Cross who recognized her and told her “I know your brother’s and sisters but please don’t tell anyone”.

Later, she was taken to a place with only kids and women, where she was taught Hebrew and other subjects. She met many people to whom she became very emotionally

attached. She was very sharp and so she was even asked to go to Loach, Poland and become a teacher. She didn't want to go because she didn't want to leave her friends. Raya noticed a girl who constantly cried, so Raya went to her and asked her, "What is the matter? Why are you crying?" She came to know that the girl's name was Helen and she was crying because she was missing her parents. Helen's brother was a smuggler who trafficked people to Cyprus.

Helen's brother, whose name was Shlamo, really liked Raya and took her out to several dates. They got engaged at the end of 1945, and were married at the end of 1946, in Poland, Germany. Shlamo was born on May 3rd, 1923 in Wyshkof. He was five years older than Raya. Raya had three children: two daughters and one son. Her oldest daughter, Sonja, was born in 1947 in Germany, her son, Mel, was born in 1949 in Holland and her youngest, Marilyn, was born in 1955. Her children used to ask her why she did not choose to go to Israel but she couldn't explain it to them how painful it was to leave people who had become so close to you.

Shlamo died in 1967 due to kidney failure and his death affected her greatly. His death really tore her down as she feels as if she lost every valuable thing in her life, a really important person who loved her heartily. She took over his business, smuggling people to Cyprus from Poland and Israel. She also went to Austria where she met her uncle and then she went to Vietnam. After a while, she went to Florida where she lived for 30 years.

At present, Ms. Gabrina lives in Alameda, California. She lives here because her younger daughter settled here after her marriage. Her son and her elder daughter are in Israel, where they wanted to live from the beginning. Even today she tells her grandchildren about what she suffered through and how she suffered. She tells them how a person has to face hardships in life and even they will have hardships in life which they have to be strong and go through like she did. She even today suffers from depression and starts crying when she remembers those days. Those days when the Nazis took over and separated her from her family, and then when she finally had a few moments of happiness, she lost her husband.

There are rarely any people in this world who have suffered like her and still are happy, kind, loving, and caring. We should thank God that we have such great people in our community. People like her are an inspiration for others to be happy in any kind of situation as many people lose hope. She remained strong and determined that she would be able to go through the pain and suffering and she did it as well. We should all think of Ms. Raya Gabrina as a role model because she remained strong even after seeing her own people die one by one and was thankful that she made it through the painful days of Holocaust.

Assemblymember Michael Villines
District 29



Is honored to present the stories of
Holocaust survivors

Ephraim Hadjis

Interviewed by Mary Trigg

Ephraim Hadjis

By Mary Trigg

My Childhood in Volos

Ephraim Hadjis was a Greek-Jewish child living in Greece in the midst of World War II. He has never told his story until now. “I blocked it out, I never thought about it for a lot of years,” Ephraim said. I looked at him and asked him what is different now, why tell your story now? He looked at me and explained that people are trying to say the Holocaust did not happen and that he was part of the last generation living during the Holocaust and that it was his duty to get his story out.

A city surrounded by beautiful rolling mountaintops and alongside a seaport, Volos, Greece was home to Ephraim Hadjis during the time of World War II. His family had lived there for thousands of years, since the time of the Roman Empire. “When the war began it was hard for the German Officers to tell that we were Jewish because our family was well educated and fluent in Greek,” Ephraim explained. A local bishop from a Greek Orthodox Church gave Ephraim’s father papers showing that he was Christian. Those papers, Ephraim later described had saved them in many close encounters with the German police.

Ephraim lived with his older brother, mother and father, who sold bedding supplies before the war. At the beginning of the war, many Jewish families living in Volos were keeping a low profile and hiding in their homes. In 1942, the German police took their local Rabbi and demanded a list of the entire Jewish community living in Volos. At this point it was no longer possible to get by living in the town. The German police gave the Rabbi 24 hours to get the list together. “During those hours the Rabbi told everyone to leave and hide,” Ephraim said. It was then that the local Greek-Jews had no other choice but to go into the mountains and seaside caves that surrounded the city. “The mountains were very steep running down into the sea,” Ephraim explained. “Some people were hiding in the mountains and others by the sea in caves. We were living like animals,” Ephraim said.

Ephraim’s family hid in the mountains. In their group that went into hiding were his immediate family, two cousins and an uncle and aunt. Ephraim told of how hard it was for his family to last through the harsh conditions. “During the snow period women and children were in the cave,” Ephraim said. Ephraim described how his father would come and go because of his false papers he had. “My father had Greek papers so he was able to go into Athens and bring back things,” Ephraim said. Although his father was very cautious about people revealing them to the Germans, there were many locals that would help hide them and bring them food. “Our town was primarily an old Greek Jewish community so those who were Greek non-Jews in our community really helped us out,” Ephraim said. Even with the help of local non-Jews it was never safe to go back to their

house. “I remember throughout the war we were always hiding, always looking for food,” Ephraim described.

It was because of this type of hiding throughout the war that Ephraim, his older brother and his parents survived. Not everyone was that lucky though. Ephraim lost many family members and friends. His grandfather was 60 years old when he was killed, and his father's two brothers were killed at 25 years old and 36. Ephraim also lost his grandmother, uncles, aunts and many cousins. Among his cousins killed, the oldest was 23 years old and the youngest was only 4. Ephraim described how Volos was one of the lucky cities. “We were lucky in Volos; 3 out of 4 survived. Yet it was hard losing people you knew and loved, but then we were thankful at the same time to not be the city that lost 99 percent of its Jewish population,” Ephraim said. In a book that Ephraim owned, written in Greek were the names of all the documented Jews killed in all the cities in Greece throughout the war. There were many highlighted names in the book that were his relatives. The book stated that in Volos only 26 percent perished. In Ephraim's family only one cousin still lives in Volos. “Out of a family that had been in Volos for thousands of years only one cousin remains,” Ephraim sorrowfully explained. It was documented in Ephraim's book that overall in Greece about 127 thousand Jews were killed, which was 90 percent of the Jewish population of Greece.

When asked about the end of the war Ephraim described his life and feelings. “We knew the war was ending because British airplanes would drop leaflets with information about the war on them, I remember that very well,” Ephraim explained. After the war was over, the Jews were expected to continue their lives and try to pick up right where they left off. Ephraim went right back to school after the war and his father began to try and rebuild their lives in Volos. “The hardest part after the war was waiting for those taken to come back,” Ephraim said. “When some Jews returned to the town people would swarm them asking if they had seen a loved one of theirs. My aunt looked for my cousin all the way up until the 1970's; she didn't want to believe he was dead,” Ephraim explained.

After reestablishing themselves as a family it wasn't until the 1950's that an earthquake made Ephraim's family pick up everything and move to America to start over yet again. Ephraim was a teenager when they came to America, and he was excited about the start of his new life. “It was the land of opportunity. I kissed the ground when I stepped off the boat,” Ephraim said. They moved to New York in a primarily Jewish community that immediately gave his family support. “For a lot of years no one talked about the war. We went through it; it was then and now is now. You can't live in the past, only the future,” Ephraim explained. “We all wanted to be done with it,” Ephraim said. Ephraim's family made a life for themselves in America. His older brother still lives in New York City today and Ephraim resides with his wife in Madera, CA.

Now after many decades have passed, Ephraim lets himself think back to the time of the war and the feelings he has towards what happened. “The question many people want to ask is if I can forgive,” Ephraim explained. “It's a hard question because maybe I can forgive the debt owed but how do I forgive for my grandpa's life being gone. Only he

can do that, I'm not entitled to that. Do I have hatred, no, but some of these sins were not done on me but on my family so I can't forgive for them they're not alive. Only God can do the forgiving," Ephraim explained. He went on to describe that he has realized over time what he lost in the war. "What I lost I couldn't tell you until I became a grandpa and realized I missed experiencing my grandpa because he was taken from me," Ephraim said. Through all the trials and struggles that the war brought to Ephraim and his family, his faith still remains strong. "What happened was a horrible thing, but I don't blame God for what happened, I blame another human being," Ephraim said.



Lilly Black



Earl Greif and Rachel Minkoff



Lea Grinberger



Irving Zale



Lilly Hecht



Devon Fernandez, Margret Kanner
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